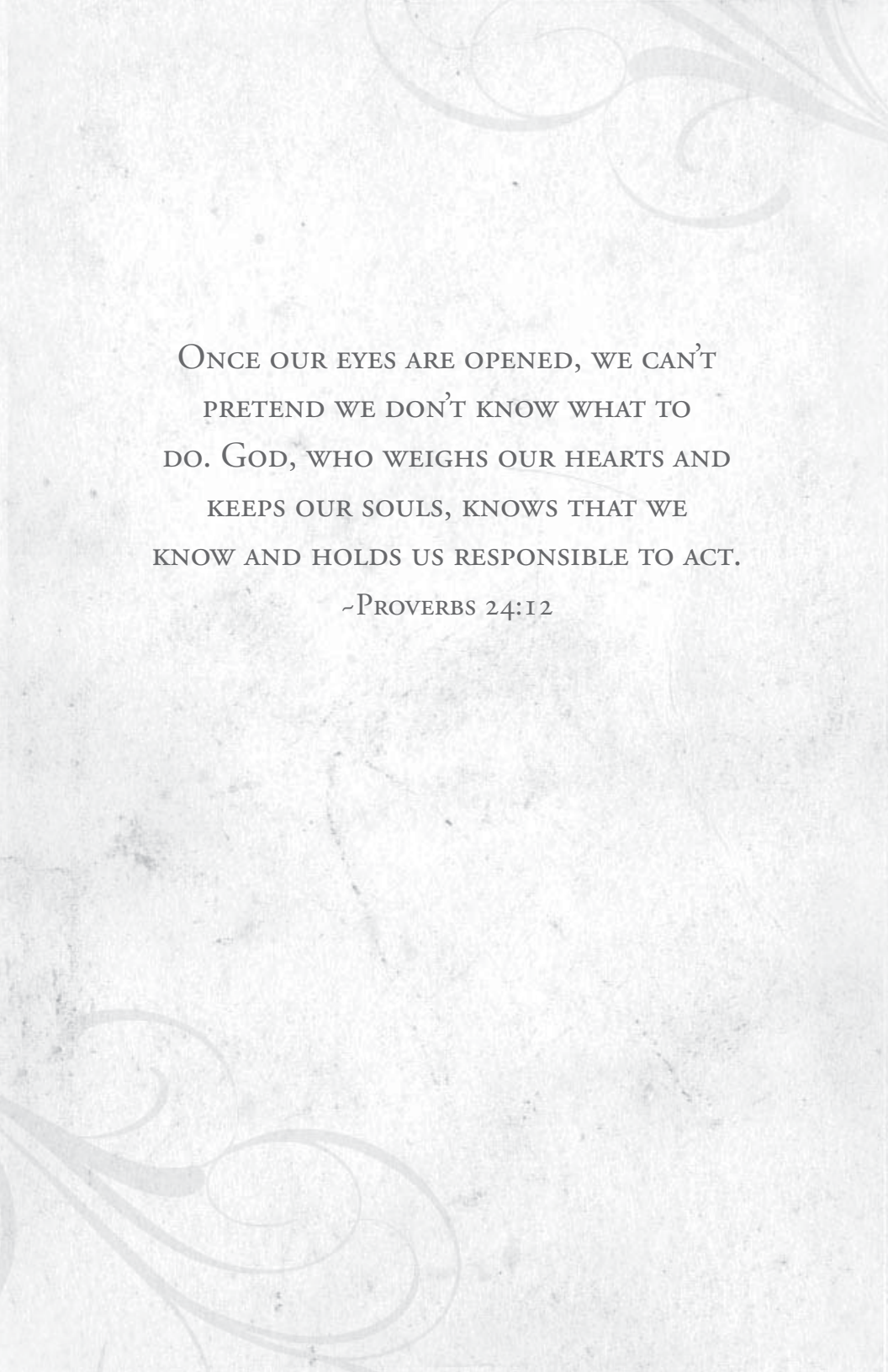


A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern in a dark ink or stain, framing the central text area.

REAL RELIGION

50 MORE STORIES OF HOPE

a time to pray for orphans



ONCE OUR EYES ARE OPENED, WE CAN'T
PRETEND WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO
DO. GOD, WHO WEIGHS OUR HEARTS AND
KEEPS OUR SOULS, KNOWS THAT WE
KNOW AND HOLDS US RESPONSIBLE TO ACT.

-PROVERBS 24:12




INTRODUCTION

50 More Stories of Hope

This booklet is about more than orphans. It actually has a lot to do with you - your identity in Christ. When you get right down to it, all people on the earth are God's children. Even more amazingly, all those who know God's son, Jesus, are truly Jesus' adopted brothers and sisters. That means at one time we were all orphans, until our heavenly Father brought us home and welcomed us into His family - one huge family where "we are all one in Christ Jesus". More amazingly we are considered more than just siblings, but truly "heirs" of God's promises with Christ. A heady thing! A promise of amazing proportions!

We certainly hope as you read this devotional guide that you consider what it means to care for earthly orphans, but also what it means to be an adopted ex-orphan yourself. Will you take a few minutes for the next 50 days... till Christmas, to read these accounts of Calvary folks' interactions with orphans, to ponder God's heart for the orphans... to reflect on His heart for you? Will you listen for His voice as He leads you into new areas of understanding? Then please consider sharing what you have learned with at least one other and taking a 'next step' in the care of at least one orphan.



The Hope of the Orphans

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2009

LEARN:

During a lay over in the San Francisco airport, I had the pleasure of meeting 7 year old Anna, 3 year old Lela and their “papa” as they waited for the same delayed flight I did. The threesome struck me immediately as they appeared to be of humble means with each girl carrying a very small homemade day pack that seemed to contain a floor puzzle, crayons, index cards and a small, much loved stuff animal. Papa himself was toting a very small backpack and a violin case. When it was obvious that we would be detained and the girls were hungry, the threesome shared a small loaf of bread, plain and a juice bottle.

Beyond their humble means, the kind and gentle ways of this likely single dad grabbed the attention of my heart and I gleaned much as I observed the interaction of this threesome. His attention upon his daughters was uninterrupted. Squabbling was met with papa’s gentle voice that seemed to dissipate disagreements and usher in harmony. When Anna and Lela would raise their voice even an octave, papa would simply put his index finger to his lips and they obviously knew what that meant as they would quiet down immediately. As the hours wore on and we waited for the departure of our flight Anna and Lela’s whining or teary complaints would be comforted by papa lifting them onto his lap to whisper into their ear or gently rub their back, absolutely attentive to their every need. Lela seemed to have more of a propensity toward being naughty as she stepped on the puzzle pieces, grabbed her sister’s beloved stuffed doggie or the like. Immediately papa’s gentle voice would utter her name, “Lela,” nothing more, nothing less. The way papa said Lela, or maybe it was the look in papa’s eye, would signal Lela to change her behavior.

Papa watched Anna and Lela play and contentment was evident in his eyes, seemingly happy to be interrupted by their voice or their needs ... such a kind and gentle attentiveness to his children. When they became restless, he distracted them. He would meet their continual questioning about the status of the flight with patient and repetitive explanations. It was an amazing moment to me when Anna finished the floor puzzle and complained that 3 pieces were missing; papa told her to remember that those pieces were missing permanently. She appeared completely satisfied with his response. Lela, at a very restless moment, proceeded to dump her crayons one at time off her chair while Papa looked on ... there was NO evidence of disappointment, anger or frustration but patient satisfaction with his tired 3 year old. Anna and Lela had obviously spent many hours in the presence of their papa and the intimacy of communication was obvious.

The most telling moment of the afternoon was when Papa left to use the restroom. He gave Anna and Lela instructions on staying put and when he “took his presence away”; it was incredible to watch the scenario before me change in an instant. The sisters became loud and excessive silly and before papa could return, Lela had taken Anna’s beloved doggie. Anna reacted by smacking her sister in the head. The “sister war” accelerated until papa turned the corner and approached our gate as both girls had a death grip on each others hair and were wildly screaming.

Papa briskly approached and quietly but firmly pulled the girls apart as he carefully held each arm to separate them. He got down on eye level with them and spoke in hushed tones with his eyes intently on theirs. Within moments, as his presence returned to them, so did their joy and contentment. Soon Anna and Lela had their stuff packed up and each lay on either side of papa – satisfied in HIS PRESENCE and care. In the final moments before we boarded our flight, the girls tried many things to please/bless their papa; rubbing his neck and shoulders, tying and retying his shoes, kissing and hugging him and on the flood of affection went. The longer I observed this endearing threesome, the harder time I had containing a smile from my face as I recognized the reality of Psalm 16:11; *it is good for us to remember that we are God’s kids and as long as He is there, we can be over-stuffed with joy... in His care.*”

Pastor Dan once preached on JOY and he said, “Perhaps few things are more essential for the life we long to live than the essential of joy - unexplainable, uncontrollable, contagious, outrageous, and extreme joy. I’m not sure if I should try to distinguish between happiness and joy.

I’m not talking about a pain-free existence.

I’m not talking about getting everything I want, when I want it.

I’m not talking about God changing my circumstances.

We define it in many different ways...all I’m saying is that if that is how you define it, I’m not talking about it. It may include circumstantial happiness...but it’s something deeper, something more solid and yet more exhilarating.”

Could it be that God offered the most accurate definition of joy in Psalm 16:11? Joy is knowing that we are ever in the constant care of our loving and attentive heavenly Father whether we have an earthly papa or not. That’s the *hope* of the orphan; to know they have a Father in heaven that cares about them! They will only know this hope if God’s people *show* that *they* care about them. As God’s people we must be His hand and feet and heart to the orphans.

PRAY:

Father, thank you that in your presence there is fullness of joy. I ask you Father to teach me one new thing about joy today. Be my Heavenly myth buster and show me joy in a place where I didn't believe it could live and thrive.

ACT:

Continue to reflect on Psalm 16, especially verse 11. "In God's presence there is fullness of joy ...". Have you been holding the opinion that orphans have a "joyless" life? Can you conceive of the truth that orphans are frequently the conduit of much joy in the life of adults who come to minister to them? As you read each future entry to come, note all the references to the surprising joy that is experienced by many. Could you use a dose of that joy yourself?

*"Adoption is More than Charity--
It's Spiritual Warfare"*

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2009

Excerpted from *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches* (2009) by Russell Moore. Dr. Moore is dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and an adoptive father. Permission granted for excerpts.

LEARN:

In *Adopted for Life*, Russell Moore reminds us of some very difficult truths about the ongoing warfare between the kingdoms of darkness and light. One such battle is depicted in the book of Revelation. In this battle a great red dragon is poised to devour the woman's child at the moment of its birth. Not any child, but a very special child who was to "rule all nations with a rod of iron" (Rev 12:5). When the dragon did not succeed, it became "furious with the woman who bore the child and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring and has done so ever since" (pp. 63-64). Dr. Moore reminds us that just as Satan hates Jesus, he also hates His little adopted brothers and sisters, especially those that are the most vulnerable – orphans with no one to protect them. Dr. Moore suggests that this hate is played out in the daily lives of orphans who are affected by poverty, hunger, disease, fatherlessness, family break up, sexual and physical abuse, drug addiction...

Dr. Moore describes the Christian church of the first century as a people who understood this battle. They were “countercultural” for the times in their stance as a widow- and orphan- protecting culture. They took God at His word and believed that faith should be expressed through actions, such as “caring for orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27 NLT).

Dr. Moore then challenges the Christian Church of the 21st century to again become a place where “unwanted babies become beloved children”, where the fatherless and the widows are remembered. Dr. Moore acknowledges that how we remember will look “different in our different lives, with the different situations and resources God has given us. But for all of us there’ll be a judgment to the genuineness of our faith” (pp 82-83). However, he suggests, “think of the kind of credibility such actions lend to the proclamation of our gospel” to a watching world (p. 79).

PRAY:

Father, thank you that You inhabit your holy dwelling as a father to the fatherless, and a defender of widows (Ps 68:5). Remind us Lord, that if we would only ask, you would prepare us to be co-defenders as well. Please arm us Lord, embolden us, and show us our part in the battle plan, a part especially prepared for each and every one who calls you Father. Help us to be your ‘gospel proclaimers’ to those who do not yet know you, as we minister to the “least of these” in your kingdom.

“Genuine Religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress...” - James 1:27 NLT

ACT #1:

Continue to pray until God shows you a step He would like you to take in the defense of orphans. Once that step is revealed, share it with one other, and then commit to taking that step within a short period of time.

ACT #2:

Consider attending the Mission Overview meeting TODAY (11/08) at Calvary from 1:30 – 3:00 PM in the Worship Room. Come learn about ALL of the short-term mission trips that will be taking place. Anyone is welcome - no RSVP required. For more info contact Beckie at rromig946@aol.com (234-9018).

Lessons Learned from Orphans

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2009

LEARN:

All throughout scripture we are instructed to care for orphans. There was just one problem: I didn't know any. Without having ever met an "orphan" in my life, I felt that I knew all about them. In my mind the word "orphan" carried with it such weight. It made me think that I knew everything about a child's life and upbringing as long as they fell under this single word title. Of course they were miserable, of course they were suffering, of course they were dejected... just like in the movies *Oliver* or *Annie*. I had objectified these "children" that I had never met as objects of suffering and misery. They needed my pity! And then I met some orphans... and I have never experienced such joy in my life!!

I've had the distinct privilege of getting to spend time in orphanages and children's homes on three continents now, and I will never be the same. The joy, love, and appreciation found in the lives of these children are incredible. Yes, they have encountered more things in the few years of their short lives than any human being should experience in a lifetime. Yes, they are small and defenseless children (or not so small teenagers) who typically have very limited material resources. But I have learned that they do not need pity from me... I need to learn love from them!

While I sit in (comparatively) the lap of luxury and think of people living in a different world from where I am, I sometimes feel so limited in what my response should be. I do believe that we have been given much in this part of the world that we would be foolish not to share. But with that, we need to remember that we have much to receive as well. I need to continue to learn to appreciate the gifts of love, joy, family, friendship, and trusting God to provide. I truly have much to learn and much to receive from these orphans!

PRAY:

Father, please help me to see these children with Your eyes, not my own. I ask also for "ears to hear", and a humbleness of heart to be willing to have a little one give to me. You have told us "blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear" (Matthew 13:16). I long to be blessed in such a way.

ACT:

As you read these devotional stories take note of the ways in which your "urban myths" regarding orphans have been deconstructed. Teach others about what you have been learning.

God Knows Best! Part 1

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2009

LEARN:

When our 8th and 9th children were toddlers, I still wanted to have a baby around. Since we were in our mid 40's, we were done birthing children, but I read an article in Good Housekeeping about a single woman who adopted a baby girl from China. I was more than excited about the idea. An agency out of Philadelphia was coming here to do an open house for international adoption. I told Dave about it and all the wonderful reasons we should adopt. He told me I was nuts. I told him to pray about it. I went to the open house alone, just to check it out. I really got excited when other adoptive families talked about adopting and how great it was, and when I met some of their adopted kids, I was hooked. Eventually God must have touched Dave's heart, because he went along with the idea.

We went to Philadelphia for a meeting, then had our home study and a zillion papers done, along with physicals, fingerprinting, clearances, etc. We sent all our paperwork to an agency in the state of Washington and began the wait. Almost a year later we got a one page referral for a baby girl named Chu Jiang. There was a wallet size picture of her, and I was in love! Our caseworker said there was something wrong with her leg. I called doctors here to find out what it was, and none of them had ever heard of it. When I talked to the caseworker the next day, she said she had bad news. I asked if her leg was amputated or something awful. She told me that SHE was a HE. Beijing had made a clerical error! I had to decide if we would accept the baby boy. At the time I had 4 boys in a row before our last birth child. They were all pretty wild, and I didn't really look forward to any more hyperactivity. But I loved that precious little face in the wallet-sized picture. I called our caseworker back and said "Yes, we would take him." God knew that our precious Sam was the exact little baby to come to our family. And because we got him and not a baby girl, it was easy to talk Dave into adopting again to go back to China and adopt our precious Payton!!! So I can truly say that God knew best.

PRAY:

Thank you Father that You are all knowing and all seeing. Thank you for the times that You remind me that "Your ways are not my ways" and that "Your ways are truly best". Thank you for Your grace as I repeatedly need to learn this lesson. Help me to give my plans over willingly to You, and to exchange them for what is truly the "best" plans. Help me Lord to always trust in You and to "lean not on my own understanding", because by doing so "You will make my paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5).

ACT:

As you contemplate the direction you believe you should go in caring for an orphan, make sure you have prayed and sought God's guidance. Be willing to lay down your plans, and take up the ones that He has for you. You may be surprised that what you lay down at one moment, may be given back in a more astounding way at another.

God Knows Best - Part 2

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2009

LEARN:

A little while after we adopted Sam, we were in line at a Chinese restaurant. Dave had Sam up on his shoulders. Sam had turned around and looked at the man behind us in line and told Dave that there was a Chinese man like him behind us. Dave turned around to see a tall African American man standing behind us. Dave told him, "I bet you never knew you were Chinese!" We all had a good laugh.

PRAY:

Thank you Lord that you do not see us through the eyes of gender, or race, or ethnicity, or any of a number of man-made divisions. Thank you that You look at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Since you do not see us that way, who are we to see our brothers or sisters in such a manner, Lord?

ACT:

Spend some time "people watching" today. Observe your instant reactions as you look at each one of your brothers and sisters. Do you make any instant judgments? If so, begin to explore these reactions with your Father, and find out what He would like to teach you. Can you see past the superficial and take a deeper look. Thank God for each person He brings into your field of vision during this exercise.

Who IS An Orphan?

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2009

LEARN:

Who is an orphan? It is easy to recognize orphans who lack clean water, food, clothing, shelter, and/or basic medical treatment (and way too easy to turn away). On the other hand, we are surrounded every day by orphans with plenty of financial and material provision. The reality is that, in some way, we were all “orphaned” by our human parents or guardians. It was impossible for them to love us perfectly. Some certainly did better than others, but our parents left us lacking. It’s not a victim mentality...it’s just a fact. Maybe death or divorce left you without a mother or father. Maybe your parents abused you. Maybe you weren’t abused, but at least one of your parents did not provide the words of affirmation, the discipline, or the wisdom that you desperately needed. Such things can leave wounds just as deep, if not deeper, than even a lack of basic nourishment.

Even if we avoid the wounds of others, we find ourselves, at some point during the day, staring face to face with the orphan in the mirror. In what way were you “orphaned” by your parents? My parents did a lot of things right. But they did not relate to each other or me perfectly. They did not resolve conflict perfectly, forgive perfectly, discipline perfectly, or live perfectly. They made mistakes and evidenced some patterns that continue to affect me today. (Did I mention that they did a lot of things right?)

What to do about it? Cry? Certainly not out of the question and possibly a good idea. (Besides, “blessed are those that mourn.”) Blame? No. Forgive? Absolutely. Express gratitude? For every way that your parents blessed you.

We need not give up or despair because our earthly parents are not the end of the story. Our Perfect Parent is sovereign over the story. God the Father (our Perfect Parent), God the Son (Jesus, our Perfect Savior), and the Holy Spirit (our Perfect Companion) are waiting – if not already working – to grow that orphan inside into a mature and complete follower of Jesus who lacks nothing (James 1:4).

So let the orphan inside be honest. Bring the orphan to the Father, and be perfectly loved (which will not leave you unchanged). God is parenting the orphan in me... slowly but surely. And as the orphan in each one of us grows up in the perfect love and provision of God, we become that much more prepared to reach out to the other orphans of the world as a conduit of that same love and provision...so that they may know and “give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

PRAY:

Today please pray that every member of your church would remember and acknowledge and praise the Lord. Praise Him that before the world was made, He loved us and chose us, and that His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. Consider that this process of adopting us gave Him great pleasure (Eph 1: 3- 5)

ACT:

As you reflect on the truths of adoption spend some time journaling about what it means to you to be adopted into the family of God. In the past you may have had some negative connotations regarding those who were orphaned or those who were adopted. Yet you were both orphaned and adopted at one time if you know Christ as your Savior. Speak to God about these feelings. If your feelings have always been positive then praise and thank him for your status as Christ's brother or sister.

"Godance's Caretaker"

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2009

LEARN:

From July 11th to July 30th of this year, I traveled to Rwanda on a missions trip. At a home for street children, I met a sister of one of the boys at the home named Godance. When I first met this girl, she spent most of her time joyfully singing songs. The first English words I heard her speak were, "I love you." She spoke them in a sweet sing-song melody. Later I learned that Godance was the daughter of a prostitute and that her mother had abandoned her. She was adopted by a man that lived in the village serving the boy's home by caring for their cattle. Through this delightful three-year-old, God showed me the type of love that He has for His children. I later discovered that at one time this girl had been fearful of people, filled with worms, covered with dirt, and had bugs throughout her body and all over her. It was amazing to see the transformation she had undergone because of the work of Christians showing their love for her. This child revealed an innocent love to me that will forever remain a source of strength that I can draw from as I undergo the trials and persecutions that will occur as I serve Christ and assail the strongholds of the enemy.

PRAY:

Thank you Father for Godance's caretaker, who was willing to take in a stranger - to feed her, and clothe her, and care for her. We know that in doing so, not only did he minister to Godance, he ministered to Your son, Jesus (Matt 25:34 - 46). We ask that You continue to bless him with all the daily resources needed in her care.

ACT:

Consider sponsoring an orphan today through many of the orphan sponsorships programs available through your church or those offered nationally. National orphan sponsorships can be found through organizations such as

Bethany Christian Services - www.bethany.org
Compassion International - www.compassion.com
World Vision - www.worldvision.org

For those who attend Calvary consider sponsoring an orphan through the Adopt a Child program at the Umuryango Boy's Home in Byimana, Rwanda. For more information explore their website at www.umuryando.org or contact Matthew at heinzmatthew@gmail.com.

The Beginning of our Story

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2009

LEARN:

Our story actually begins before my story. Let me explain. When Kim and I started getting serious about our relationship (in college), she told me that she knew three things about her future:

1. She wanted to be a pastor's wife. Check!
2. She wanted to be a Mary Kay lady. Um, not sure what that meant, but ok...
3. She wanted to adopt children some day. Well, 2 out of 3 ain't so bad, is it?

Little did I know that God would do a work in my heart to bring me to do a 180. I went to the DR with Calvary for the first time in 1999. Spending time with the boys at the orphanage opened my eyes to the need for adoption of children with no family. Kim would ask me about adoption from time to time, and each time I gave her reasons (excuses) as to why it wasn't for us. She stopped asking, and started praying. And God began to move.

Two more trips to the DR...Years of seeing those young boys in need of homes, in need of families...

In 2005, I had the opportunity to travel with Pastor Dan to a meeting of leaders who were working to see their cities transformed. There was a couple there from China. God drew our hearts together, and something began to shake me up. One morning, while browsing some news stories online, I ran across an article that detailed some changes the Chinese government was implementing. They would no longer allow late term abortions for women who discovered that they were carrying baby girls. The article concluded with the statement that within a few months, orphanages would be filled to overflowing with unwanted baby girls. My heart broke. I began to weep, and had to call Kim.

Let's do it! Let's adopt a baby girl from China!

And with those words, our journey took an exciting turn.

PRAY:

Pray for the tens of millions of women in China who have undergone abortions since the onset of the "one child" policy in 1979. Especially pray for those who carry with them the memory of a late term abortion, after having felt life stir within them. Pray for their willingness to come before their Heavenly Father and give this burden to Him, ask for His forgiveness, and receive His love, peace, and assurance of mercy in return (Psalm 103:8-13).

ACT:

Consider watching and reflecting upon the You Tube video "Bring Me Hope". Consider the young woman's story who makes a difficult choice to leave her baby at a doorstep, instead of choosing abortion.

Listen to her words:

"Last week I leave my baby go. How much I love you. How much my heart is aching."

Let your heart break with compassion for the choices that have been made by millions of Chinese women who have "left their baby go". Remember that the "giving away" was done with great love and hope that her child would be tenderly cared for by another.

The video can be found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iC2rmCRQRKQ>

Remember your Mercy Dream

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2009

LEARN:

One Sunday this summer, Kim noticed a word in a song during worship: Mercy. She heard God whisper to her, “remember your mercy dream.”

Shortly after we'd entered the adoption process, Kim had a dream. She was walking into a dark gymnasium. There, in the middle of the gym, standing in a spotlight, was a little Chinese girl. Kim noted that she wasn't a baby (we originally wanted to adopt a baby girl), nor even a toddler; she was a young girl about 5 years old. In her mind, Kim knew that they couldn't communicate with words. She knew that the girl couldn't speak English, and Kim certainly doesn't know Chinese. As Kim approached, the girl lifted both arms and simply said, “Mercy.”

Kim was struck by this dream, and told us all about it. We chalked it up to us thinking about our new baby girl. But the confusing part of the dream was the girl's age. We wanted to adopt a baby, not a 5 year old.

Fast forward through four years of waiting for the adoption to come through, and lots of questions without answers. Kim decided to call our agency to check on the process. While not able to give us a firm date, our case worker said that the best case scenario was at least another whole year of waiting. We were not encouraged, to say the least.

A few days later, Kim received an email from our agency. Inside the email was a link to pictures and bios of several children who were waiting to be adopted. Most of them were older, and had varying degrees of special needs. When 9 year old Mei Yun's picture came up on her screen, Kim involuntarily caught her breath. She called Lilly over to the computer, and asked, “Could this be our Annabelle?”

We called the agency, and inquired about 2 of the girls in the email. One had a family already interested, but Mei Yun was still waiting. We had her file and medical history sent to us, which locked her out for other families. We had a week to make a decision: Could this be our Annabelle?

Kim and the girls were pretty sure from the start, but Levi and I were hesitant. We'd been praying for a baby girl for four years. Was God changing our plan? Levi and I were headed to SOS (our summer camp) that week, but we agreed to pray about it all week. That's the week that God reminded Kim of her dream.

At SOS, I had the opportunity to talk to a young girl who was adopted from China at age 13. She's a delightful young lady, with a terrific sense of humor. In the course of our conversation, she asked me a few key questions:

- * So you want to adopt a girl from China? Yep.
- * There's a girl in China right now that you could give a family and home? Yep.
- * Why don't you want to go get her? Um, well, yes, that's a good question.

If you do the math, we've been waiting for this process for four years. Annabelle is 9. Kim had a dream about a 5 year old four years ago. Could this be our Annabelle? I called Kim immediately, and said, "Yes. Yes, let's go get our daughter!" As of right now, we have tentative plans to travel November 19-December 3. We'll be bringing our daughter home.

PRAY & ACT: Please pray for the Sublett family in the next two weeks as they extend their arms to Mei Yun, a child who has been waiting for them, although they didn't know it at the time. Pray for all the details of their trip, for the safety and health of all, for hearts of mercy and love that knit quickly together, for joy and laughter, for peace and comfort..... for thankfulness for God's good gifts that come in packages so different than what we expected.

Oscar

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2009

LEARN:

Groups of our team were prayer-walking through La Acequia, Honduras. We were also distributing medical kits, spreading the word about a town meeting, and asking families if they needed or wanted prayer. Along the path I saw a child limping, his left arm dangling lifelessly next to his body. As I got closer, I began noticing his face was partially 'crooked'. As he spoke, his words were slurred, but he had a smile that showed a joy that only God could give. His name was Oscar; he was diagnosed with a brain tumor during his early childhood. He learned to play and get along in life with this debilitating disability after being told that there was nothing anyone could do for him. His future was completely uncertain.

From the day our team discovered this child in May 2008, the journey has involved non-stop prayer and networking. We continued to run into roadblocks in finding the right people to further evaluate Oscar's diagnosis. Beyond the pain of waiting, Oscar was continuing to lose function in his body. Through our praying over this

past year and a half, our team leader has divinely met people in his path that have been able to assist us on this journey to help Oscar. With vigorous effort and persistence from the strength of our Precious Lord and Savior, our leader made the right connections.

Since May 2009, Oscar has had x-rays and has gone through all the necessary procedures needed for him to come to the United States. As the Lord wills, the plans are for him to return with a missionary nurse at the end of October 2009 to have surgery at the University of Pennsylvania.

This child has overcome so many obstacles and now by God's grace and power he has a hope and an opportunity to have a healthy, full, quality life.

PRAY:

Please keep Oscar in your prayers and the many other children in Honduras, who may or may not be living with parents, but suffer from neglect, abandonment, abuse, and apathy from a country that has lost touch with a living, breathing, all powerful, all knowing, all loving God.

ACT:

Consider learning more about the work of New Life Student Fellowship in the town of La Acequia, Honduras. Speak to the director, Johnny Pons, at (814) 863-7874; or spend time on their website at www.newlifepsu.com (use the Honduras 09 link for details). You'll find Johnny worshipping most Sundays at the 11:00 Midtown service of Calvary.



Remember Me

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2009

LEARN:

Remember Me...

Remember Me...

Remember Me...

Remember Me...

What starts as a request, sometimes out loud,
coupled with laughter and other times in hushed tones laced with tears...
sometimes finding its shape in written form,
the words carried from the heart onto pieces of tired paper...
when put altogether, voice after voice after voice,
each one as distinct as its speaker
after the “I pray for you...you pray for me” exchange comes the plea...
please, please, Remember Me.

PRAY:

Consider the scripture – “I thank my God every time I remember you” (Gal 2:10). Consider that there are orphans throughout the world that have been momentarily forgotten – not by God, but certainly by man. Ask God to help you “remember” just one.

ACT:

Spend time exploring the Faces of the Forgotten project available through Google Earth. Visit their website at www.facesoftheforgotten.org/. This website is committed to “raising awareness among Christians about the global plight of orphans”. Pick a country that draws you, and learn specifically about the plight of the orphan in that place.

Everywhere I Go I See Jesus

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2009

LEARN:

...and it's breaking my heart. I wrote those words in January, the last few days that we were in Myanmar. Remember the story in Matthew 25. Jesus is talking and he shares that story of the good guys (sheep) and the bad guys (goats). The good guys are the ones who give Jesus water when he is thirsty and food when he is hungry. The good guys are the ones who give Jesus clothes when he is naked and a home when he is homeless. The bad guys ignore Jesus in need. The good guys and the bad guys both say: *"Jesus when did we see you in need?"* Jesus responds, *"whenever you care for the least of these my brothers, you do it to me."*

In Myanmar, a country that is over 80% Buddhist, a country where 90% of the people live on less than a dollar a day, everywhere I go I see Jesus... and it's breaking my heart.

The last Sunday we were in Myanmar, Lynn and I prayed for a woman who runs an orphanage in a very remote area of Myanmar, the Chin State. She had an orphanage in the mountains – forty one children. Because they are so remote, they have no sponsors, so they come to Agape Orphanage when they need help. It is the poor helping the very poor. The Nargis Cyclone hit them hard, so they had gone into debt buying food. When she came she had used up all her credit, unable to buy food for a few months. Her children were walking the fields looking for corn and rice that had been dropped behind in the harvest. For the last month, her children had been eating one time every three days. Joseph – the Agape Orphanage Director – asked Lynn and I to pray for her and her children. We prayed and the tears streamed down her face.

As we were praying, the thoughts going through my head were – I'm praying to Jesus who is eating once every three days in the mountains of the Chin State. We gave her \$700 — the \$500 we saved from not paying extra for our baggage and \$200 we took for personal expenses. Enough to help for a couple of months. Tears in my eyes — I can honestly say that I have never had such a strong desire to be rich. If Jesus really is to be found in the "least of these," if you ever go to Myanmar you will see Jesus everywhere you go...and it might break your heart.

PRAY:

Jesus, help me to see you everywhere I go. Help me to see the opportunities you put before me to serve you in need by serving people in need. Create within me a deep desire and ability to be generous. Share with me the joy of giving.

ACT # 1:

Consider sponsoring a child in one of the Myanmar orphanages. One possibility is through Lifetime Orphaned Children's Ministry. Contact Larry Synder at (814)-237-4504 or snyd1719@aol.com.

ACT # 2:

Please pray specifically for your pastor. Pray for guidance as he or she seeks to follow the Lord's commands to personally care for orphans, as well as leading the church in that ministry. Pray for provision within your church to do the work that God has revealed.



Jesus Te Ama

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2009

LEARN:

Twelve years ago we attended Calvary for the first time on Palm Sunday and we heard Craig Kissell talk about the recent mission trip to the Dominican Republic and God tugged at both mine and my husband's hearts. We talked on the way home about how we both felt God telling us we needed to go on the next Spring Break trip, and we did!

What a life changing event! We worked at the Solid Rock Clinic in San Juan de la Maguana for the week but, at the end we were asked by the missionary there if we would like to visit some boys at an orphanage and maybe play ball or something. That was the start of a lifetime love for the boys at The Rose of Sharon Orphanage. We have done all we physically can to help these boys.... built a new school; built a new cafeteria and kitchen; supply sheets for their beds; and buy food for them to have full stomachs when they go to bed, new clothes, better school teachers and shoes. We provide field trips in the surrounding area, so they can know the beauty of their own country. But most of all we have shown them unconditional love. We love these boys as if they were our own. Many have asked why we can't live there full time! That is a real heart jerker!!

We have been going to the orphanage for over 12 years now having led hundreds of people to work for and play with the boys. We have heard many times over that people go to be a blessing to these boys and it has been quite the opposite - they are a blessing to us! My husband and I tell every boy "Jesus Te Ama", and "Brooks and Sharon Te Ama", which means "Jesus loves you" and "Brooks and Sharon love you" and they say the same in return. Everyone in life should go on a mission trip, it is - LIFE CHANGING! Do you feel a tugging at your heart? Come along with us to see these beautiful children.

PRAY:

Reflect on this Scripture: Once our eyes are opened we can't pretend we don't know what to do. God who weighs our hearts and keeps our souls, knows that we know and holds us responsible to act. Proverbs 24:12

Pray and ask God if he is calling you to a short –term missions trip in the near future where you can personally tell the boys "Jesus Te Ama". Or He may be asking you to support someone who will be traveling to the DR with others from Calvary. Listen carefully to what your heavenly Father has to say.

ACT:

If you believe God is calling you to be involved with the Rose of Sharon Orphanage contact Brooks Way at 814-692-8943. There are two upcoming missions trips to be held March 6th – March 13th, 2010 or March 13th – March 20th, 2010. Additional information can be found at <http://www.calvarysc.org/dominicanrepublic>

How Can I Thank Her Enough?

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2009

LEARN:

How can I thank her enough for...

- making the choice to carry her son for 9 months, when others strongly urged her not to?
- flying to Georgia to attend a match meeting with a couple she never met, especially when she was gravely afraid of flying?
- going through the physical pain of child birth and then encouraging me to be the first to hold her son, since I was his “mother”?
- riding down the elevator at the hospital holding her son for what she feared was the last time, and then watching him placed in my arms? Tears were streaming down her face as she said “good-bye”.
- walking away with empty arms and a grieving heart as I walked away with a beautiful child in my formally empty arms?
- for wearing her best dress and best smile as we had a goodbye visit a few days later, knowing that we were taking her son 1200 miles away?
- for keeping her son in her thoughts and heart through many phone calls, letters, and visits during his 13 years of life - moments that always involved another goodbye for her?

PRAY:

I ask you this day to pray for all women who have chosen to carry their child and then thoughtfully made an adoption plan. Ask God to bless each one who gave sacrificially in order to allow another couple to have the joy of raising a child. Please pray for their comfort, their peace, their joy. Please pray that society will quickly learn to offer them our respect and our heartfelt thanks.

I am praying for each one who is reading this entry. I am praying that your heart has softened a bit toward these women, realizing that they have sacrificed greatly and cared more deeply than you ever realized.

ACT:

If you would like to read a few stories from a birthmother or birthfather's perspective, consider visiting the Bethany Christian Services website at www.bethany.org. Under the "I'm Pregnant" caption at the top of the page you will find a link to "My Story". Then follow the link to the "Stories" section.

The Week I Went to My Birth Grandparent's House

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2009

LEARN:

My birthparents, Stephie and Bobby, were college age when I was born. They decided that they wanted to place me for adoption and chose my adoptive family to raise me. When I was born in Florida my adoptive mom got to hold me first. Then I went home to State College, PA to live with my mom, my dad, and my brother, Daniel.

That wasn't the last time I got to see my birth mom. When I was 6 months old I got to meet my whole family on my birth mom's side. I met my grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins - and of course my birth mom. It was great - everyone wanted their picture taken with me. Then I started visiting them every year on my birthday.

When my birth mom got married I was the ring bearer, and my brother, Daniel, was an usher. And now I have a half brother, Matthew, and a step birth father. I get to see my half brother at least two times a year.

One of those times was the summer. I stayed a week at my birth grandparent's house while my mom was in China working at an orphanage. I got to go to an amusement park and an eat-in movie theater, swim in their pool, play all day long with my half brother, and spend lots of time with my birth mom and grandparents.

I love having so many relatives. I love knowing I look just like my birth grandfather and love the Red Sox, just like they do.

PRAY:

Will you help me pray for all adoptive kids to meet their birth family some day? Pray that God will arrange the day of their meeting so that it is very special time to learn about how their birth family loves them and thinks about them often.

ACT:

Consider the thoughts and feelings that arose for you as you read this story. What did you think about the fact that this young man not only knows who his birth mother is, but actually spent a week with her without his adoptive family? What do you know about today's open adoption arrangements which are becoming more prevalent between birth families and adoptive families in America? Is it possible some of your beliefs are truly myths that are being disproven? If you would like to learn more, consider reading "Eight Myths About Adoption" located at www.impregnant.org. Follow the Adoption link for further details.

Denny, I Love You

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2009

LEARN:

My story is about Emmanuel...an orphan at Umuryango in Rwanda. Emmanuel is a teenager...I met him on my first trip to Rwanda. We became fast friends....he was very quiet...a hard worker...always a positive element in the home. On the last night of our three week stay we had a going-away party...we danced, ate, played games...it was a wonderful time. At the end of the evening we sat in a large circle....had communion and said tearful goodbyes to our new friends. Emmanuel came up to me... looked in my eyes and said, "Denny, I Love You."

In my past teaching, coaching and recreation years I have worked with thousands and thousands of children and teenagers....but no one ever said those words to me. I looked at Emmanuel and told him that, "I Loved Him Too."

During my second trip to Rwanda I spent more time with Emmanuel and our friendship has grown. He is a wonderful young man, a hard worker, a child of God. I am so grateful for his friendship. I pray for him and look forward to spending lots of time with him when Gloria and I return to Rwanda in January.

I thank God for bringing Emmanuel into my life. I am so blessed to be his friend and to have the privilege of spending time with all of the boys of Umuryango.

PRAY:

Ask God to raise up workers for the harvest (like Denny) to go to the "fields of the fatherless" to experience the joy of caring for orphans as we are commanded in

Isaiah 1: 16 – 17. Spend some time reflecting on this scripture: “Give up your wicked ways. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Fight for the rights of widows”. What is God calling YOU to do about the fatherless?

ACT:

Pray specifically for Emmanuel and other teenage boys who are yearning for a father. Ask God to bring someone to them this very day.

The Great Family Plan - Part 1

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2009

LEARN:

Originally written Thursday, November 1, 2007

“[God] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion...” -Philippians 1:6

My wife and I created a family plan. Okay, it was more my plan than hers, but it was a great plan and we took many things into account. For instance, we figured how many years we wanted between our daughter and our future child. We timed the payoff of our car loan to coincide with new baby expenses. And we left enough child bearing years for the other children we expected to have. Timing was crucial and we were sure we thought of everything.

So, in the right month, we tried to conceive. We left some leeway in case the conception didn't happen the first month, which it didn't. This was fine, since our leeway period gave us three months. It took us three months to conceive our first child, so this timeframe seemed reasonable. But after our leeway period expired and still no pregnancy, I began to panic. I mean, our plan was great. What was the problem?

Well, that was three years ago and still no baby. When the doctors started using the term, *“unexplained infertility,”* I refused to admit it. No, infertility was not part of the plan, was never part of the plan. We were wasting valuable time with all these doctor exams. Didn't they know our biological clock was ticking? That we had to crank out not only one more child, but two more after that, since the plan provided for four total children? Didn't they know about the plan?

Sometime in the last year, I threw the plan out because it was impossible to live by. But once I did, the world opened up.

We've been officially approved for international adoption, and we couldn't be happier. And get this – the date that is written on the approval document is my birthday – October 20. So once the process is finished, we'll welcome a boy (or two) into our family. He'll be from the Philippines. The experts say it takes 18-24 months, but I've stopped worrying about timing.

When our infertility problems began, I asked certain questions: “*Where is God in all of this?*” I knew with a batting of His eye, He could cause us to conceive ... like He had with so many of our friends. “*So why hadn't He? What about us?*” I wondered.

Then I realized I was asking the wrong questions. And I was asking the wrong questions because I was fixed on my plan. I forgot there was another Plan out there. If I remembered the other Plan, I would have been asking different questions.

Philippians 1.6 says that God has begun a good work and will complete it. I forgot that God was completing His Plan for my life and my family's life. And that Plan included Him not batting His eye when we wanted Him to. It included Him not giving us what we wanted when we wanted him to. If He had, we wouldn't be adopting. And that's part of our Plan I never considered.

I imagine in days ahead when we meet our boy and dance with glee and exclaim, “*He's ours!*” then God's Plan will make perfect sense. I imagine I'll be quite grateful for this other Plan. I'll wonder why I took so long to get on board. Next time I won't plan so hard.

PRAY:

Surrender your plans to God.

ACT:

Consider helping to fund the adoption of someone you know. This would allow you to “sponsor an orphan” who would actually be coming home to YOUR CHURCH. Domestic infant and international adoptions can range anywhere from \$10 - 45,000 when all expenses are completed. If you attend Calvary you can contribute to our Adoption Fund by using our weekly offering envelopes.

If you attend elsewhere, check and see if you have an adoption fund. If not, you might want to consider starting one. You can find information about this process through Steve and Mary Beth Chapman's orphan care organization called “Show Hope”. Go to their website at www.showhope.org and follow the Adoption Aid link to the Church Funds section.

The Great Family Plan - Part 2

A Life Story

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2009

*"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."
-Psalm 139.16*

Our family is preparing to adopt Rex, a toddler from the Philippines. We're only weeks away and so we're preparing for what adoption experts call, "The Big Change." One important aspect of adopting is helping the child understand his life story. Children who have been adopted often have disconnected life stories—they don't know what happened in their past or what their memories mean—and so they need help connecting their life story. This is what we'll do for Rex.

From medical records and case studies we've pieced together most of his story, but one big piece was missing. Rex was left at the hospital by his birth mother—probably the smartest and most loving thing she could do in her situation—and at three months of age he was transferred to a childcare facility. From there he lived with a foster family and soon he'll join our family. But what exactly happened at the hospital in his first three months of life? What happened after he was abandoned by his birth mother? Did anyone hold him? Did anyone hug him? Did anyone love him? That was the missing piece.

But do you know what? It has been found! Our caseworker discovered an online article written by a social worker in the Philippines. In the article, she chronicles her first case of an abandoned child. Guess who the child is? You got it, Rex. According to the social worker, a nurse at the hospital—called Ms. X in the article—cared for Rex during his three months in the hospital. Although a single woman, she felt a "motherly instinct" for Rex and was attached to him. When Rex was discharged from the hospital, she "found it difficult to separate from him" and cried for him. We don't know what his birth mother went through—if she cried for him—but we know that Ms. X did.

Do you see what happened here? After Rex' birth mother abandoned him, a mother figure rose up to hold him, to hug him, to love him. And one day Rex will understand that love followed him wherever he went, because that is part of his life story.

PRAY:

Reflect on Psalm 139: 13 – 16, especially the passage that speaks of our days being written in God's book before one of them came to pass. Consider asking the question "What's He written for you?"

ACT:

Pray for at least one adoptive family in your congregation by name. Do not forget to pray for the birth family and any caretakers that God brought into that child's life on his or her adoption journey. Those might include foster care families, foster care and/or adoption care workers, nurses, doctors, attorneys, teachers, judges, and many unknown to us.

A Heart Undone

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2009

LEARN:

While in Myanmar last December, there were numerous children who captured my heart. But two of them, even more than the others, completely undid my heart! Their names were Abraham and Suzanna. I found out a few days into our trip that they were brother and sister. They had been abandoned by their mother at a local monastery. The monks, unable to care for them, brought them to the Agape Orphanage.

Their story was heartbreaking, as most of the stories are. Suzanna was 6 or 7 years old, and Abraham was about 3. When Abraham was a baby, he was abused, probably by his mother, but that part is unclear. At some point, he had either boiling oil or water poured on him. It caused horrible burns on the one side of his head. He must have raised his hand up to protect his face, because his one hand was severely deformed as well. A few of his fingers had melted together, and his pinky finger was useless.

Abraham was very shy at first, but by a few days into our time there, he loved to be held and carried around and loved on. His sister Suzanna was the same way--shy at first but then by our sides constantly while we were there. Despite their abuse and abandonment, they loved freely and affectionately! What a gracious God to have had them brought to this Christian orphanage where they could learn of the love of a Heavenly Father! We were able to leave some money for them to bring Abraham to the hospital to have some reconstructive surgery to allow him to have more use of his hand. We can't wait to go back and see how he is doing! I know that my heart will never be the same again!

PRAY:

Father, we lift before you these children who have been abandoned by those who were supposed to love and protect them. We ask that they would know the deep love of their heavenly Father, who will never abandon them, never forsake them, and never forget them. We pray that you would show us the ways in which you want us to be the heart and hands of Jesus to them. Amen

ACT:

Consider helping to fund the surgery of an orphan. Your US dollars often go a very long way toward the cost of a surgery overseas. For further information about this action step consider partnering with Show Hope or Mercy Ships. See the Fund a surgery link under the Donate Tab of www.showhope.org. Or become as “Shipmate” with the Mercy Ship organization. Go to this link: <http://www.mercyships.org/make-a-gift/shipmates>

Rich in Faith

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2009

LEARN:

When I think about my experiences in Myanmar I think about James 2:5. It says, “Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn’t God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren’t they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him?” The children I have been blessed to interact with at Agape are the truest examples of what it looks like to be rich in faith. Three girls I am particularly fond of continually amazed me throughout the week. It’s hard to pinpoint one experience with them. One thing I will never forget, though, is watching them worship. They were joyfully praising Him and earnestly seeking Him through their songs. They worshiped with complete abandon—clearly not caring about what those around them were doing. They worshiped their Creator in a way I hadn’t in quite some time. They had so little, yet still found so many reasons to sing praises. I had so much, yet often had so many conditions before I would give my all to Jesus. It caused quite a heart check.

I think one of the most important things I learned though, from watching them worship, was that it didn’t stop when the singing stopped. Their actions of serving each other, loving each other and joy in the midst of trials were a continuous act of worship. I think it can be so easy for us to compartmentalize our lives. We praise and worship on Sundays and in bible study or youth group. When we are not at church-

related activities, we go on about our daily lives without much of an eternal perspective. These girls' lives were acts of worship to God - they were so young, yet I feel as though they had an eternal perspective. They knew this life was not it. There is so much more to be living for. They understood that.

PRAY:

It is my prayer for each of you that you will understand that as well. Everything we do has the potential to be an act of worship for our Creator! My job, my relationships, my school work, it all can be an act of worship. I pray that you will find more opportunities throughout your day to worship our Jesus with the same kind of abandonment shown by these precious girls in Myanmar.

ACT:

Consider what you can do to be in worship and praise of your Heavenly Father throughout today. How much He longs for you to be in communion with him throughout the day.

Legacy

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2009

LEARN:

I spent the afternoon yesterday in the internet cafe. The power in town was out, so the cafe was empty since it was temporarily shut down. This afforded me the chance to hang out for almost two hours with Jeremie and Gilbert, who work at the cafe. It was one of my favorite times over the past few weeks, as we talked about a lot of things, from their backgrounds, to Global Capacity, to Umuryango. I showed them the Global Capacity website and they recognized pictures of some of the streetboys who came from Gitarama. When they spotted Siliac's picture in particular they began talking about his parents. (I already had known the deal with his parents, as Umuryango finds out about the child's family before he comes to the home.) Siliac's father had been killed by police while he was robbing a store and his mother is a prostitute in Gitarama. It really caught me off guard and surprised me that Jeremie and Gilbert knew this. I wondered how many more stories they knew about our boys and what type of legacy these boys' parents have built for them.

It made me think of how small a town Gitarama can seem, even though it is the second largest city in Rwanda. A person's name and character is so important in Rwanda, and everybody seems to know everyone's business. I noticed this when our

house had been broken in to. Everyone seemed to know about it. In town people would ask us if our house really had been broken in to, and if we were OK. And even more odd is that everyone seems to know where we live. When we take scooters to our house, the drivers know where to go. So, I can imagine how quickly word spreads here, and unfortunately the negative can often travel quicker and farther than the positive. So, I am sure the tragic and unfortunate pasts of the boys and their families are well known throughout town. Siliac's parents for example, have left a miserable and undesirable legacy for him. What little boy wants his parents to be known for being a thief and a prostitute? I can't imagine the torment he would endure in years to come had he stayed on the streets of Gitarama.

This is why I am so thankful for homes like Umuryango, who rescue children from potential miseries like a rotten legacy, and give them a chance to redeem those miseries. Siliac has progressed so much since he has come to Umuryango just 5 months ago. If you could meet him you would not believe that he had come from such a terrible family. He is well-disciplined and natured and has a huge heart. The other boys share similar stories like Siliac's, where they had been seemingly destined to continue with a bad legacy in their lineage, but thankfully their destinies are being redeemed and rewritten.

It is such a pleasure to sit back and watch a boy be further transformed into the glory of God.

PRAY:

Today, please ask God to protect children affected by war and violent conflicts. Pray that the Lord will protect their vulnerable hearts and keep them safe. Pray that a church will reach out to them.

ACT:

Learn more about the genocide that occurred in Rwanda in 1994. Spend time on the Rwanda: The wake of a genocide website at www.rwanda-genocide.org/.

My Hero: "María Remedio"

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2009

LEARN:

During my arrival at the airport in the Dominican Republic I had a surprise greeting. This trip is one of many that I have made to work and be a part of the Rose of Sharon Orphanage in San Juan de la Maguana. The administrator, Danilo, and his wife, Celeste, from the orphanage came to meet Laura and me and drive us, three and a half hours, back to San Juan to the orphanage. My friend, Maria, who cleans at the orphanage, also came with them to surprise me. She was waving and immediately stepped out of the crowd with her arms waving in the air to hug me. We have become like sisters as our friendship has grown during my visits to the DR in the past six years. Her Love for the Lord, and His children is above all else in her life. Both of her own children died as infants from disease because she had no opportunity to receive medical care. She lives in the barrio, where I walk to visit, passing pigs and goats that share the same roof as their owners and where children who need nutrition follow me, smile and call out my name.

During each visit to the DR, Maria comforts me with her love and guidance. I use my weak Spanish to communicate with her. Her love for the Lord passes through me as she helps me to know her home is my home. The bottle of Pepsi she buys for me from a few houses away is a delicacy. She returns to her home to go out and buy one needed egg to make the gingerbread cookies for the boys. Her small gifts to me, of a peeled orange or mango melt my heart with joy. But most of all I love how she sings praise to the Lord. Soft songs of joy are heard as she mops the floors, moving the mop in motion to the tune. During church service she comes across the room to share her Bible with me, pointing to the verses in Spanish, helping me to absorb God's word.

That night she came to the airport and our four-hour return to the hotel was very late. I invited her to stay with us at the hotel, suggesting that she could return home in the morning when we went to the orphanage. She quietly agreed. The 48 steps up to our room seemed like forever at almost midnight. Laura and I entered the room weary, focused on getting to bed quickly. As I turned around from unpacking, I saw Maria on her knees by the chair with her Bible in hand in prayer. As I write, it brings tears and humbles me to experience such deep devotion to our Lord. Once, I asked Maria what makes her so strong in the Lord. She reads the Bible, sings to the Lord and prays morning, noon and night. This night was no different for her. I

gave her my clothes to sleep in, my toothbrush, my washcloth and a towel. The next morning we awoke to again see Maria on her knees in prayer, very softly humming a song of praise. God was speaking to my heart, sharing his love with me through my friend, Maria. That morning Laura returned from the market with a box of cereal, three bowls, milk and three spoons for our breakfast. Maria was quick to take initiative to wash the bowls and silverware while Laura and I prepared to go to the orphanage. I asked Maria if she had been to the hotel at a previous time when the mission teams were there. Her reply: "I've never seen inside a hotel in my life." She patted the bed saying, "Good Bed!" She thanked us for inviting her to stay with us. No words could ever express my gratitude for having her as a friend in Christ.

Maria is my hero because of her enthusiasm and her devotion to love the Lord. She loves the Lord all day wherever she is. God walks with her in her heart at work and play. Her secret to living life in a poor country, where she barely has food and shelter, is, loving the Lord with all her heart, all her soul, all her strength, and all her mind. Her life belongs to the Lord and she has shared this with me in our friendship. Life is short, and I want to live my life like Maria. Thank you, Lord, for my sister in Christ, Maria Remedio, who is teaching me to know you and love you with all my heart, soul, and mind, and in song, from your Holy Word.

PRAY:

Please pray for the caregivers all over the world that they may see the Lord's face, experience His grace, and be renewed in His strength.

ACT:

Please pray for Maria specifically. Ask for continued health and strength to minister to her Lord as she cares for the least of these.

Lucy

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2009

LEARN:

Lucy was my favorite. I hate the fact that I have a favorite, but I do. I remember when we met. She was staring at me, nodding vigorously and gesturing toward a small foam football. Then we moved on to a frisbee. We spent many an hour interacting with each other from a distance that day, but we never exchanged a single word or even touched. Everyone touches in Myanmar, especially the orphans.

Lucy had spunk and strength. She loved sports, played hard, and acted tough, but she warmed up to me eventually. I still remember sitting around the fire at New Years with her on my lap. As the night dragged on, it dropped in to the seventies, bitterly cold for them. Later on, even the orphans began to tire and she vainly tried to stay awake. For a few blissful moments I got to hold her in my arms as she slept.

Throughout my visit to the orphanage Lucy and I would spend a good amount of time together. Even when we were apart, we were looking for each other, exchanging smiles and laughs from across the room. I would miss her if I did not see her for a day or two.

The last day was emotional for both of us. She, as many of the orphans do, hid her tears with laughter, but was desperately holding onto me. Right before we left, I picked her up and embraced, lingering in the moment. I was not sad, but incredibly grateful for such a precious moment to remember. My tears waited for later.

There are times now, where I am overcome with an emotion quite strange to me (I am single and without children). I am overcome with the desire to run back to Lucy, pick her up and kiss her on the forehead, and tell her how much I love her. The joy and pain of this thought mingle in a most unusual way that is far from comfortable, but I cherish these moments nevertheless. Fortunately, I'll be seeing her in less than a month.

PRAY & ACT:

Pray for Lucy specifically by name. Pray for this particular orphan worker as she has recently returned from Myanmar and is likely missing Lucy. Ask our Heavenly Father to show her how to love Lucy from afar. Ask God to show YOU how to love an orphan from afar.

Pearl of Great Value

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2009

LEARN:

Sitting on the warm tiles, surrounded by hundreds of fidgeting orphans, I attempted to lean back without crushing one of them. They laughed, grinned, and pushed close, eager to be near. It was easy to feel loved in such an atmosphere. Just by making eye contact and laying my hand on a shoulder, I could win an orphan's heart. Bouncing, beaming, giggling, they would follow me about, and we would have a grand time gallivanting about the orphanage.

Connecting with such pure hearts is one of the greatest blessings on earth. Barriers are gone and social norms stripped away. I would sit down with orphans and truly delight in them, as they delighted in me. There were no agendas. We just wanted to be together, regardless of what we were doing.

How easily we fell into loving each other speaks of the beauty of their innocence, but it also reveals a deep desire in their hearts and mine. The desire of someone's company, to be loved, appreciated, and delighted in. I did not have to prove myself to them to receive their love, and this is where the danger lies. It is not that they should change the way they love, but that we should recognize and protect such a treasure.

Love cannot be earned. These children have no pretense of that. Unfortunately, the ability to love can be destroyed or taken advantage of. If we are not looking out for these children, they will give themselves over to whoever else presents the opportunity. If we do not clothe them or feed them, they will be driven to desperate acts in order to survive.

Within these children are invaluable truths about love, the most important aspect of our walk with Jesus. These children are a treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great value, and they are far more precious than any of the trapping of this world which we may be chasing after.

PRAY:

Today please pray for God's provision for missionaries Gerald and Sharon Mohler (past Calvary folk) who currently serve those who are without clothing, food and other resources in many countries of the world. Gerald and Sharon serve through the Global Aid Network (GAIN) Distribution Center in Lancaster, PA. Please pray for Sharon's upcoming missions trip to Russia between January 29 and February 10.

ACT:

Consider participating in the June 2010 “packing projects” to be held at the Lancaster Distribution Center. Last year 2500 different volunteers helped with processing and packing clothing, shoes, medical equipment, blankets, school supplies, and food items for shipping to those in need. For further information go to the www.gainusa.org website and click on the Get Involved link. Then click on the Distribution link. Or contact Gerald Mohler at (717) 285-4200

Out of the Mouths of Infants

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 01, 2009

LEARN:

The first time I traveled to Myanmar, I was so naive about the people there, what I was going to experience, and how the kids were going to impact me. I went with a self-righteous attitude, thinking very highly of myself for taking a week out of my busy life to go spend time teaching little unfortunate orphans from a third world country about Jesus. However, after the first 5 minutes at Agape Orphanage, I got a huge reality check and was very humbled. What I thought was going to be a week filled with me teaching, ended up being a week filled with me learning more than I ever thought possible. Every kid is so happy, and so grateful for what they have, which is little to nothing. They literally spend their days worshiping and giving praise to God. I find it hard to give twenty minutes of my day to Him, yet they are so in love with Jesus and so thankful for what they have that they absolutely cannot contain it.

There is one girl in particular, Glory, who has a cleft lip. So often, kids with this condition are shy and keep to themselves more because they are embarrassed. Glory, however, is the complete opposite. I have never met a girl who is so wild and crazy and in love with life. Not once did I see her crying or upset. Not once did I see her angry towards others. She is always the one laughing, jumping, running around, cracking jokes and making faces.

When I first laid eyes on her, I felt sorrow. I selfishly thought how happy I was to not be born with this condition. Now, when I look at her, I see one of the most beautiful faces God has created. I see a girl with hopes and dreams. I see a girl who doesn't care what other people think about her, and isn't afraid to be herself. I see eyes that shine and a smile that lights up the room.

These kids may not have the same chance at a successful future as we do, but they have the love of Jesus radiating and oozing out of them. They cannot be contained. They don't let the fact that they are poor and surviving in a world where living out their faith is a crime get them down. They practice their faith in real and big ways. So why can't we? We live in a world where we have the freedom to live out our faith in a way that they don't. We owe it to them, to ourselves, and to God to stop being shy or embarrassed to spread the Word of the One who saved us. And while this is a lesson we hear over and over again, once you see these orphans giving thanks for the simple things, your entire perspective will be changed and your heart will be filled with love. These children are a truly special group, and can teach a lesson and touch the heart of any person who is willing.

PRAY:

Thank you God that you have gifted Glory with a natural radiance that shines through her smile and her eyes. Thank you that she exudes life and joy and love – all good gifts from you. We ask Lord that she continue to use her lips to praise you – out of the mouth of children and infants You have ordained praise. Remind us that praise is your greatest instrument of warfare for these little ones – an instrument that silences the foe and the avenger (Psalm 8: 1 – 2).

ACT:

Make a special effort to praise God in the midst of trials and tribulations today. What better way to silence the avenger in your personal circumstances.

The Eyes of Fiece

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 02, 2009

LEARN:

I will not be able to get the eyes of Fiece out of my head. He is a street kid here in Gitarama and he has the most telling, big, brown eyes. He is very close to my heart and I am hoping he will become a resident of Umuryango one day soon. Fiece belongs to a group of street boys who have become very close to us. When we are in town they have learned to spot us from a mile away. It is amazing how quickly they appear and find us. Sure, most of the time they run to us so we can give them food or water. Some times we do.

The look in Fiece's eyes that disturb me are not the eyes of satisfaction and pleasure, even though he has that look after we give him some nourishment. His eyes that are engrained in my head are the ones of desire, of want, in all actuality, of need. They are the eyes that I see when he asks and pleads for food or water. I would like to provide him with these modes of survival as much as possible. However, I know that I cannot. I know that I can't give him these things every time he asks for them. If I did, every street kid in Gitarama would be at my side, expecting these too. And Fiece would learn that he can get anything when he wants it. Saying "no" to him when he asks for food or water is so incredibly difficult for me, but I know it is necessary. It is the others with eyes like Fiece that draw me to be here in Rwanda and to do the work that I am doing.

PRAY:

Today pray for the children of the streets in any country. Pray for children that live under bushes and in dumps and in sewage pipes. For children who eat meals out of trash cans. For children who are invisible to those who pass by. Ask our Heavenly Father to open the churches' eyes to help them see the orphans all around them. Ask Him to provide food and shelter quickly for each and every child.

ACT:

Learn about the organizations that locally house children/teens without shelter. In the Centre Region we have a variety including: the Centre County Women's Resource Center (234-5222), Stepping Stone Transitional Living (234-2632), Stormbreak Runaway Shelter and Burrowes Street Youth Haven (234-2100), Centre House (237-5508) and Zerby Gap Familyworks (422-0540).

The Children that Wait: "Hope Deferred"

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 03, 2009

LEARN:

I walked through the hallways of the Chinese orphanage on my last day of a 3-week missions trip. Studying each of the paintings - looking for the one that would best represent my trip to China to "care for orphans with special needs". Happy, smiling, children, with those beautiful Asian eyes, peering down from the majority of the paintings. Reminders that the children of the "orphanage" find joy daily in the midst of their "circumstances". Reminders that children are the true MISSIONARIES, sent by God, to heal the heavy and weary souls of adults who "labor" to help them.

Yet, there is one painting that won't release me! Those haunting, pleading eyes... that limp and lifeless young body that should be full of mirth and constant motion. Here is a snapshot of "hope deferred" – of older children in every orphanage on earth who wait and watch as others are chosen, and they are left behind. Giving voice to their unheard cry - "I have given up on being the one chosen!"

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
but when dreams come true,
there is life and joy. Prov 13:12 (NLT)*

"Surely, God, You did not mean for me to bring this painting home? What about the smiling children?" And the response came back "What about those who wait???? What will you, my dear child, do for THESE children?"

PRAY:

Please pray for the waiting children who have lost hope, whose hearts are sick from dashed expectations and empty promises. Pray that God's dreams for them will be unleashed, and that life and joy will come quickly and abundantly, even today as we utter this prayer.

ACT:

There are over 100,000 children in the foster care system alone in the United States who are available for adoption, yet they continue to wait for a family to bring them home. Consider what you can do to advocate for these children. Will you commit to praying for one waiting child daily until he or she finds their "forever family"? You can find pictures of waiting children at the Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) website at:

www.adoptpakids.org/WaitingKids.aspx

Try printing out one picture, placing it on the dashboard of your car, and praying each time you see that smiling face.



What am I Worth?

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 04, 2009

LEARN:

Elijah came with us to carry all our new purchases when we went shopping. We were buying skirts, hats, and blankets and learning where our friends from Agape shop. So I said to Elijah, "What do you want? I will buy you something." After much thought and going from shop to shop we stood before a shop filled with blue jeans. He had the shop keeper get his size and asked how much they were - then he bartered for a better price. His countenance fell and I asked him how much they were - "10,000 kyats" (\$10.00 US). I said "We will take them!"

He could not believe I would spend that much on him.

It is always a blessing to see the difference in a child when they are made to feel like they are special.

PRAY:

Please pray that each child - young and old - would see just how unique, how special, how worth while they are.

ACT:

Today, ask for forgiveness for Christians around the world who forget the orphans and forget to heed 1 John 3:17: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him".

Actively search for someone in your neighborhood that you can share your material possessions with.

Home for the Holiday

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 05, 2009

LEARN:

The month of July is a holiday from school for the children. So, the Umuryango boys have been off from school. Today most of them left to go visit their families for two weeks. So, there was a lot of excitement this morning as 14 boys packed their bags and gathered their taxi money. That's right, 14 of them have families to go to. This is a concept that is difficult for me to understand. If they have families to visit, then why aren't they living with them? Why had the boys chosen a life on the streets versus a life at home with their families? Possible answers are poverty or maybe abuse. No matter the reason it is very difficult to imagine the nightmares they were living before coming to Umuryango.

I was so excited for the boys who left today to go to their families. They all left the home at the same time and walked to the taxi stop. But my heart was hurting for the 6 boys who don't have families to go to. Boys who are orphaned, who don't have parents, who don't have the opportunity to go anywhere for the holiday. I sat and watched them as the boys left for the taxi stop and imagined what they were thinking. On the outside they seemed fine. They were playing marbles and the fact that others were leaving didn't seem to phase them. They seemed happy for them. So, hopefully that is true and they were not truly hurting inside.

PRAY:

Today, pray for children who are not yet orphans, but may only have one parent who may be sick or dying. Pray for the health and safety of their remaining parent. Pray for God's provision for that parent. Pray for the protection for the children in these homes.

ACT:

Consider donating to a ministry program that focuses on keeping children within their home of origin. Bethany Christian Services, although an adoption agency, is working to preserve families in several countries overseas. Currently they have preservation programs in countries such as Ethiopia, Romania, Ukraine and Zambia. For further information regarding how you can help fund these Family Support programs speak with Jodi Stouffer (814-441-0187) or visit the www.bethany.org website. Click on the Other Resources link, and then the International Services link.

Marvin

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 06, 2009

LEARN:

My first memory of 14 year old Marvin was to witness his huge smile and friendliness. I noticed that he didn't talk but would only utter dull sounds from his mouth. Marvin was always serving the other children and staff members in the orphanage school.

This was my first trip to the Institute for Foundational Learning (IFL) in Cubuyu, Philippines. The orphanage school housed about 105 children at the time but of all the children, Marvin grabbed my heart the most.

Through a picture that Marvin drew he told me the story of his birth family. He had lived in a three story house, a rare find in the Philippines. A grenade was thrown into his house and the house blew up. His parents were on the first floor and his sister was on the second floor; they were killed in the blast. Marvin had been propelled from the third floor of the house into a nearby body of water.

All that IFL knows about his past is from this drawing. Marvin had been found wandering around a small village and somehow God brought him into the loving arms of the IFL family.

Marvin was at his best when he was serving people. From sweeping the cement floors with a tiny handmade broom to serving others their meals from the kitchen, Marvin always did so with joy and a smile.

On my second visit to IFL the Lord really put it on my heart that Marvin needed help with his hearing and speech so I arranged to have him tested in Manila. I received word that the hearing aids were not working for Marvin. It was then that the director began to search for hearing impaired schools for him.

Currently Marvin lives at his new school and is overjoyed to be with others who sign. His learning ability has soared and they believe that he will make a very good teacher some day. What a joy it is to have a part in changing the direction of this young boy's life.

Marvin has taught me so much about serving the Lord with gladness despite your circumstances. But more than that, Marvin has taught me about love. He loves the Lord with all his heart and loves others with the same fervor.

PRAY:

Today, ask God to protect children affected by war and violent conflicts. Pray that the Lord will protect their vulnerable hearts and keep them safe.

ACT:

Listen to the YouTube video Prayer of the Orphan – a song written by a missionary who returned to a children’s hospital after getting supplies to find that the hospital had been bombed and all the children had perished. The song can be accessed through www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTZFIcqnQMg

You may remember hearing this song in the promotional video for Real Religion, as well as in the stairwell as you ascended from the upper to lower floors at Calvary.

No one to hold them

MONDAY, DECEMBER 07, 2009

LEARN:

In the summer of 2003, I was able to go to Managua, Nicaragua for three weeks. While there, I spent a few days in the downtown area of Managua at a government-run orphanage, which consisted of maybe 10 different buildings for boys and girls of various ages—from newborn babies to early teenagers. Our team spent the day in the section for 0-6 month-old babies. The babies were in a terrible situation. There was one young lady working there, taking care of over 15 newborns. Not only that, but she told us she works 12-hour shifts, 6 days a week. Now, I don’t know much about childcare, but I *do* know that one lady cannot take care of over 15 babies for 12 hours every day. Without us there, babies would go hours in dirty diapers. Worse than that, they would be without the loving touch of a mother or father for equally as long. They would cry and simply not have anyone to hold them. Sadly, I saw the long-term effect of this lack of love as we visited the ward for 1-3 year olds. There, we found that children had developed the ability to “rock themselves” because of the lack of love they had received in the younger ages of this orphanage. They sat on the floor, crying and rocking themselves into some sort of comfort.

What did these orphans need? Simply: Love. They need a loving touch. They need another human body to be in contact with them, providing emotional and physical comfort in their stages of development. The positive side to the story is that we were able to hold them, and feed them, and care for them the few hours we were there. Did it make an impact on them? Perhaps a little, but not in comparison to the lack

of care they received the rest of the time. Did it make an impact on *me*, and how I view “orphans”? Absolutely. God cares so much for them, and I can only hope that someday He will allow me to pour the love of Christ into orphans’ lives, just like these

PRAY:

It is my prayer for all of us that God will continue to stir in each of our hearts a desire to help these in such dire need.

ACT:

Spend some time journaling and reflecting today on what God has been teaching you over these last 31 days. By now He has likely been showing you an area of orphan care He specifically created for you, in advance even of your knowledge of it (Eph 2:10). If you have not been able to take the first step in this area, ask God for the courage to begin walking.

Will You Be My Mother?

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 08, 2009

LEARN:

Her name was among many others in a basket. I was instructed to pull a name, make a card, and pray for this student. The name I pulled was Rachael. Rachael was then given this card by a fellow missions trip member, on the subsequent trip to Myanmar. Rachael understood that someone would be praying for her.

Later, I went to Myanmar. A 14-year-old girl became my constant companion as we walked, arms linked, around the campus. Her name was Rachael.

Then the question came – “Will you be my Mother?”

What does that mean - when you live on the other side of the earth? Each trip, she was there, my constant companion.

She had a mother who cared, but still the questions came – “Will you buy me a new pair of shoes?” and “Will you buy me a watch - a black one?”

The year I could not go - Rachael got married and one year later - she was having a baby. Then the question came - “Will you name my baby?”

I am anxious to meet Anthony Paul, born in July.

Before I ever left State College, God put the name of a daughter in my hands. As I stepped onto the ground at Agape, Rachael chose me as her Mother. Did God put that in her heart?

PRAY/ACT:

Pray for children who are growing up so quickly in various countries of the globe. Here in the United States the thought of a 15 year old being married and having a child is quite “foreign” to us. Pray for their safety in child birth, as this is often the number one cause of death in women in third world countries.

Eight Boys

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 09, 2009

LEARN:

In the past few days I have been spending a lot of time with eight certain boys, two sets of four to be exact. One of the sets is the four Umuryango boys who are in secondary school - Jean Pierre, Ndahimana, Thierry, and Daniel. They left for school yesterday, and I miss them a lot.

Getting to know them has been so pivotal for my experience here so far. They know English the best out of any of the boys, so I have had some great chats with each of them. Their stories are so inspiring because they have come from misery and tragedy. Three of them don't have parents and the other one does, but they are extremely poor. I was listening to the song “Beauty From Ashes” last night and thinking about these four spectacular boys - well, men. Thinking about where they have come from. I didn't know them when they were living on the streets, but I see other street boys and can only imagine these mature men in that predicament - begging for food, shivering, imagining a bleak future or not one at all. Getting to secondary school is very difficult and only about 10% of Rwandans get in. Of those 10%, not all attend because of the expense. So, it would be very remarkable for these four to someday attend school.

I contrast these four men with the four street boys whom we have had the privilege of getting to know - Fies, Hasane, Olivier, and William. They are always around in Gitarama when we are out, asking for food or water. Two days ago Fies and Hasane came to the house because they had each been sliced with a razor by one of their other friends. They wanted medical care and Theresa and Valerie were both out, so Hadija (our housekeeper) and I tended to them. Hasane had a 3 inch gash on

his forehead and nose and Fies had one on his wrist. When I opened the gate to let them in, each one of them hugged me so tightly that I felt as if he was my son whom I hadn't seen in a long time. It was glorious! As Hadija and I tended to them, I couldn't help but think about the difficult life they had - to be slashed by a razor by one of their friends because he wanted the little money they had acquired by begging, to be wondering when the next meal will come from, to hope that it won't be another cold night under the open air. Hadija gave them our leftover dinner from the night before, they ate it up, and I let them out.

The next morning they came back so Theresa and Valerie could have a look at their wounds. Hasane's wounds were infected, so Theresa re-treated them. I held Hasane as she put hydrogen peroxide on his open wound, and he was in so much pain. He wrapped his little arms around me and held on to me so tightly, and whimpered for a bit. As they left, I thought about how incredible it would be for them to turn out like the four secondary school boys. They will most likely be moving to Umuryango in the next month or so, and will have the opportunity to attend school. I thought about the song "Beauty For Ashes" and how I am so thankful that God acts in the lives of all of his children to make beauty out of misery, tragedy, and ugliness.

Below are the lyrics:

*He gives beauty for ashes
Strength for fear
Gladness for mourning
Peace for despair*

*When sorrow seems to surround you
When suffering hangs heavy over your head
Know that tomorrow brings
Wholeness and healing
God knows your need
Just believe what He said*

*When what you've done keeps you
from moving on
When fear wants to make itself at
home in your heart
Know that forgiveness brings
Wholeness and healing
God knows your need
Just believe what He said*

*I once was lost but God has found me
Though I was bound I've been set free
I've been made righteous in His sight
A display of His splendor all can see*

PRAY:

I thank you Father for your mighty power to redeem all – that even from the ashes of dashed hopes and despair, You come and create something beautiful. I thank you that you are willing to take our fearful nature and replace it with strength. Thank you that you promise to turn the tears of mourning into the oil of gladness (Is 61:1-3)

ACT:

Pray particularly for these “eight boys” by name - Jean Pierre, Ndahimana, Thierry, and Daniel, Fies, Hasane, Olivier, and William. Ask God to make a way in the wilderness for each of them. Pray that He gives them strength, gladness and peace today and each day that follows. Especially pray that “they will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of His splendor (Is 61:1 - 3.)

A Letter From Your American Family

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2009

LEARN:

(written in October, 2009)

Dear Zo Hnem Par,

I hope you are doing well. We are good, thank God. We are enjoying our first snow fall this year. An early snow for Pennsylvania.

I hope you received the last package we sent you. In this package I wanted to give you a pair of barrettes and a bracelet to remind you, you are beautiful. I also included in the package a notebook and pens. The notebook is for you to write down your thoughts, your feelings, prayers and poems if you'd like to. Maybe you could write a new song. I know you are a good singer.

Always remember God loves you and cares for you. You have a special place in our hearts. We think of you and we will keep you and your family in our prayers. Take care of yourself and please say hello to your parents, your two brothers and two sisters from us.

With love,

The Lucero Family

Jorge, Maribel, Jorge (age 8), Lucas (age 7), Mateo (age 4) and Little Lucia (age 2).

PRAY:

Pray specifically for the Lucero Family who has been willing to maintain ongoing contact with a child overseas. Pray specifically for the children of the family who are watching their parents' live out God's command to visit orphans in their distress. Ask that these children carry on their parents' tradition of caring for the least of these.

ACT:

Consider writing a letter to any of the children who are living in orphanages sponsored by Calvary. Contact Matthew Heinz (heinzmatthew@gmail.com) for the name of a child in Rwanda, Larry Snyder (237-4504) for the name of a child in Myanmar, or Brooks/Sharon Way (692-8943) for the name of a child at the Rose of Sharon Orphanage in the DR.

Love Endures Forever

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2009

LEARN:

My phone range on June 11, 2009. “Hola!, Mama Maria.” “This is Howard.”

In 2003 I had the privilege of meeting Howard, then age 10, at the Rose of Sharon Orphanage in the Dominican Republic. Howard became my special helper and close friend as we painted a mural of the story of Noah’s Ark together with the other boys. Howard asked me to be his Mother and I agreed.

A few years later Howard made his own decision to leave the orphanage to live with his uncle in another town. Each visit to the orphanage I would inquire as to how Howard was doing and receive little or no information. The phone call in June reunited me with Howard in the DR. The home that Howard shared with his uncle had burned to the ground. His only possessions were the clothes he was wearing. So he has returned to the area of the orphanage to live with his grandmother. He spoke of the Noah’s Ark mural we made together 6 years earlier and that he loves me and God still loves him. In my kitchen, hang the photos in the frames that Howard made and gave me in 2003 and 2006 saying “Dios Me Ama” (God Loves Me), “Jesus Me Ama” (Jesus Loves Me).

Once you have loved an orphan, your life is never the same. You will have the assurance that “Nothing separates you from the Love of God.” (Romans 8:28-39). No, not time, fire, or distance. My love for Howard endures forever! I carry Howard in my heart! I have plans to see Howard in November.

PRAY & ACT:

Reflect today on Psalm 136. Consider the myriad of ways that God, Our Father’s love endures forever. Praise God the Father for His enduring love for Howard, for his uncle and grandmother, and this mission worker. Most importantly praise God for His enduring love for you!

Filling an Empty Nest

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2009

LEARN:

Several years ago, I was considering the impending reality of my inevitable empty nest and decided I had about 10 years of solid nurturing left in me. I shared this revelation with my husband and followed up the disclosure with a recommendation that we should adopt or foster or something. After all, I reasoned, the longer you parent, the better you get at it, so that about the time your time of active duty is up, you're better at the job than you were 20+ years ago, or in my case, 24+ years ago.

To say that my husband was not at all convinced or persuaded by my recommendation to move in such a direction would be a gross understatement. My recommendation was not met, in any way shape or form, with the same level of excitement and zeal with which it had been delivered. "Been there, done that. Now, let's move on to our great unknown adventure," more accurately captures his reception of my idea. And so, I wait...

One day, a few months later, my husband comes home and shares with me that he thinks he is supposed to go on a mission trip to Myanmar, however, he won't be able to do it now, so...maybe next year.

Well, next year came, and my husband did travel to Myanmar with a fine group of folks from our church. And when he returned, he shared the experience with me, often with eyes full of tears, especially when his stories were about the orphanage children.

I'm thinking... "Orphaned and abandoned children are bringing tears to my husband's eyes...this is a good thing!" He follows up each antidote with the recommendation that I go with him on his next trip. And so I did, along with two of our three children.

And the rest, they say, is history.

My husband has travelled to Myanmar six times thus far and I have been blessed to accompany him on three of those occasions.

Even though those orphaned and abandoned children are not physically present in our home, they are most definitely present in spirit!

For me, the children are embraced as a whole, i.e., all the children at each orphanage we visit in Myanmar. Then a focus on the children of each respective orphanage, (we usually visit about six different orphanages.) And then, there are the children in my classroom and lastly, and more personally, there are the children who have wormed their way into my heart forever, each one a precious treasure.

Our involvement with the orphans in Myanmar, from the time of my husband's first trip to now, has changed our lives. Thoughts of them...prayers for them...and stories about them are enjoyed in our home just about every day.

Traveling to see them, participating in the LOCM sponsorship program, and contributing to specific projects geared towards improving their quality of life has redirected our household spending.

In John 20:29, Jesus tells Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

I am humbled by the folks who give of their resources, because they believe they should do so, even though they themselves do not personally know the recipient. I consider them to be in the company of the "blessed who have not seen and yet have believed".

God knows what motivates each one of us. I am thankful that He let me get up close and personal with those in need, to cement my belief and to motivate me to behave in a way that reflects my conviction.

I am thankful that God is perfect. He has managed to fill my empty nest while giving my husband his great unknown adventure. And we've been able to share the whole thing!

PRAY:

Today, thank the Lord for all that He has already done in the hearts of the congregation at Calvary and other churches in the Centre Region. Pray for each person who is working in the area of orphan care that their words and their actions will bring glory to Christ's name. Thank Him in advance for all that He is yet to do. Smile, you are likely part of that grand plan!

ACT:

Speak to a friend who attends a local congregation in the Centre Region. Find out what their church is doing for the orphans. Share with them a project at your church that is close to your heart. Consider whether there could be cooperation between like minded ministries. Maybe you will be the catalyst for a dialogue about this very idea.

Agape Orphanage, Christmas Day, and Walmart

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2009

LEARN:

I didn't take pictures. It just seemed wrong. On Christmas Day — not only did I preach to 1500 villagers, counting men, women and children — but you (Calvary) helped to feed them. From dollars that you gave we were able to give a meal and the rice for two more meals to everyone who attended. (In fact that was probably the main reason they came, since my preaching is not really a huge draw in Myanmar!) They received a box of cooked rice with 2-3 small pieces of meat — the meat was a luxury — and a small piece of bread. They also received a bag — maybe a pound — of rice for future meals.

I watched them stand in line waiting for their free food. (Those were the pictures I didn't take.) Actually I watched them push and shove and knock elderly people and small children to the ground as they were waiting for free food. At first it disappointed me, then I remembered that they were hungry and I realized that they were afraid that the food would run out.

At first it disappointed me, then I remembered our Walmart Black Friday story. One thousand plus people standing in line to get a good deal on a high definition flat screen, stampeding through the doors, trampling and killing a temporary employee.

We push and shove and stampede for a \$200 discount on a HD TV. They pushed and shoved and stamped for food. I'm still disappointed...that those people are so hungry and so worried that the food will run out. But I am so thankful that Calvary gave and continues to give. I didn't take pictures, it just seemed wrong, but the picture is stark in my mind. I pray that the day will come when Americans won't stampede for TV's and Burmese won't have to stampede for food.

PRAY:

Jesus we see you in the hungry. Far too many children in the world today will go to sleep with hunger in their minds and an emptiness in their hearts. Far too many children will die from preventable poverty conditions. I want to be the one who shares his food, and his heart. Let me be the one.

ACT:

Be in prayer about how God might lead you to give to our 1% offering to help the poor around the world.

Holy Discontent

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2009

LEARN:

A couple of years ago, Pastor Dan Nold preached a sermon series about Nehemiah at Calvary. Dan challenged us to discover our “holy discontent”, a challenge also presented by Bill Hybels in his book by that same name. He encouraged us to allow our passion to fuel a fire within us that would change the world. This study touched our hearts in a special way. It seems that a lot of people struggle to discover their passion, the one thing that ignites that fire in their hearts. For us, it was never even a question. We were blessed to know immediately.

Our passion for caring for orphans developed about ten years ago, early on in our marriage. We were newlyweds, just out of college, and Lori was working as a case manager at a Christian foster care agency. It was in those early years of our marriage that the Lord asked us to open our home to children in the foster care system in the future. Lori was touched and burdened (and sometimes a little overwhelmed) by the needs of the children for loving, consistent, and safe homes. We discussed our plans to foster parent and adopt someday, after our (future) birth children were in school and we had some parenting experience under our belts. God had other plans... Ten years later, we are amazed at how God has directed our lives and how He has prepared our hearts for this important and rewarding ministry. Having no birth children, we are now brand new parents to our first foster child, an amazing blessing wrapped in a one-year-old body. We are enjoying our new role—caring for, loving, and teaching him each day. We are blessed to share our home with him. And we learn new things from him every day too! Michael is a true joy. We pray for him and his birth parents daily. We don't know how long we will be able to share our lives with this sweet little guy, but we love him and pray for the best for him always. We are excited about what God is going to do in his life. We're also excited to see what He does in our family. What a blessing we've been given!

PRAY:

Please pray for this foster family who has been willing to open their home to a child. Pray for their ability to surrender their heart to Michael, knowing that at some time he may return to his birth family. Pray for the birth family as well, that they will allow God to make the changes in their life that is needed for reunification, and if not, that they will voluntarily relinquish Michael for adoption.

ACT:

Consider whether God is calling you to become a foster care family. Further information regarding becoming a foster care parent can be obtained through the Centre County Office of Children and Youth Services. You can review their website at: http://www.co.centre.pa.us/cys/foster_care.asp.

Sponsorship in India

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2009

In 1997, I began sponsoring a little boy named Kuldeep Shinde from Mumbai, India. He was four years old at the time. I continued sponsoring him until late last year when he grew out of the sponsorship program. Below you will read excerpts from letters he had sent me throughout the years...

Greetings from Mumbai, India! Thank you very much for your letter. I am happy to know that you are also a student like me...I am six years old... By the grace of God everything going on smoothly. Please pray for me and my studies, so that I will get more wisdom...closing with love.
Yours lovingly, Kuldeep

We celebrated the Birth of Jesus in our school. We had different program on that day. We had today's holiday for Christmas. We had a nice picnic this year... Our third unit test is going on now. Please pray for me and my studies so that I can get good marks. I am praying for you and your studies. With love. Yours, Kuldeep

I like playing with my friends. I love playing cricket...It is summer season now. It is very hot and humid. You don't feel like going out any where during the day. I wish we had snow fall in Mumbai...I am nine years old...Thank you very much for praying for me. I am also praying for you.
Your loving, Kuldeep

I will be turning ten years old...I am looking forward to celebrating my birthday. My final exam will be starting soon and I want to do well in them. Thank you very much for writing to me also for the love and concern you have for me. Closing with love. Yours loving, Kuldeep

I love my school till the end of my life because teachers are my gold, school is my temple and all my friends are loving me there. I praise the Lord. Your loving, Kuldeep

...I wasn't the best at always writing Kuldeep, but as I have looked over these letters, I can see how he has grown physically, mentally, and spiritually. It proves the point that a little can go a long way, so don't write off your efforts. I am all the better for the 12 years I got to know Kuldeep.

Yours lovingly, *Jonathan*

The Naming of Ethan

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2009

LEARN:

In Myanmar it is customary to ask someone whom you love and respect as your close relative, either physically or spiritually, to give a name to their new arrivals. We have been humbled and honored to do this for three different couples in Myanmar.

When we met Peter and Chin in person, Chin was expecting their second child and we were asked to give its name. I knew that because they already had a son, Chin was not just praying for a daughter, but she had the children praying for a daughter as well. Around their home were pictures on the wall of little girl babies with one prominently placed above the headboard of Peter and Chin's bed. Like most things, I can only say that I knew the gender of this child by the Holy Spirit's guidance. I didn't have the heart to tell her that God had already revealed to me that the child would be a son.

When the time came for the baby to be born, Peter emailed me that the baby was a very healthy 9 pound baby. He gave me many other details and even sent a great picture of the child. I read the email many times before I wrote back to him. "Peter, I would be happy to name your child, but I need to know something - Is this child a boy or a girl?"; a very important detail. When his answer arrived it was confirmed, that this was a boy.

I am not one to name things until I see them so I did not really have a name ready to go. Enter the Spirit again, the name of the child should be Ethan.

My wife Ruth asked me that evening, if I had a name in mind and I said I like the name Ethan. She got this look that women get, and said “Ethan? Where did you get the name Ethan? I never heard that name from you in all the years that we have been married?”

I replied, “I do not know, except to say that it came from the Lord.”

Being a childless couple, we had in our early years picked out names for our future children, and were both partial to the name Levi. In kicking the names around in my head I thought Ethan Levi sounded better than Levi Ethan, but Ruth was not settled on this name from out of the blue. After retiring to bed, Ruth asked me, “What does the name Ethan mean? I would really like his name to mean strong.” I told her in the morning we would get on the internet and research names and see what we could come up with. I found a website that not only has names, but also the meaning and origin of names and proceeded to punch in the name Ethan. Ethan - Hebrew in origin. I walked to the kitchen and said “I found a name that means ‘firm or strong’. How does the name Ethan sound to you? It’s confirmation enough for me.” Levi, by the way, means ‘loves people and friendship’.

PRAY:

Thank you God for knowing us all by name, long before we are brought from the womb!

ACT:

Please pray for Peter and Chin as they strive to be God’s servants in all that they do.

Sometimes She Misses China

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2009

LEARN:

Exerpt To: John Aeby; From: Dannah Gresh; Re: Holt Magazine, June 22, 2009

I know that writing this will be a catharsis. I am an adoptive mother struggling to reach into the recesses of a broken heart,—that of my precious fifteen-year-old daughter Autumn (Cloud) Gresh. She is in her bedroom writing too. She is having a bad day. Having been adopted at the age of thirteen, she misses China today. I



encourage her to write her emotions in the pages of a journal. Some of her thoughts are too private. She writes those in Chinese so I cannot read them. I feel as if those Chinese characters represent an ancient code within her that I have to crack to find her healing. I'm fairly certain it is going to take me a lifetime to read her.

In 2004, God opened our family to the idea of adoption. We were on a missions trip in Zambia (Africa) and fell in love with more than one orphaned child. We prayed: "God, if you want us to adopt, we are willing. Drop a child into our lap and make it clear." He did, and when He did our hearts had been marinating in the call for two years.

In 2006, my husband's best friend Troy VanLiere called him. He'd just come from China where he and his wife, Donna, had adopted two girls a few years earlier. He forwarded this photo to my husband's laptop.

Troy explained, "All she wants is a mom and dad, but in eleven months she'll age-out and won't be adoptable. What should I do?" Before we knew it, we realized that God was dropping a child into our laps.

And she was thirteen.

PRAY & ACT:

Please pray for the older children who vividly remember their birth families and their homes prior to joining their adoptive families. Pray that they will bring their sorrows to their Heavenly Father. Ask God to be their comforter. Pray for the adoptive families as well to know how to help their child grieve the losses they have experienced.

Father to the Fatherless

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2009

LEARN:

Who is this child who has taken my hand? Even though we cannot communicate easily with words, there is an unmistakable bonding heart to heart. When we are apart she learns a few English words and I try to learn a few Burmese. She smiles when I am near and cries deeply when I go, and in the last days we are together the big question comes "Will you be my father?"

God says I will be a father to the fatherless and on a spiritual level I know He means just that. But on a human level I have been chosen to try my best to show this child the love of a father. How can I do this from so far away? My only resource is to pray for her as any father would for his daughter. "God please take care of my daughter while I am away, hold her safe in your arms and guide her thoughts toward you when she is afraid. Please show her the love I cannot be there to give. Love her as you have loved me. Amen."

Can an orphan change your life? My life will never be the same having gone on a mission trip to Myanmar and I would not wish it otherwise.

PRAY:

Lord I praise you. Thank you God, for allowing me to be a father.

ACT:

Please pray for all the fathers today who have made choices not to abandon their children but have chosen instead with God's guidance to be the best earthly father they can be.

Today, also ask the Lord to help your church congregation to feel His heart for the orphans as seen in Psalm 68:5-6. God is a "father to the fatherless, a defender of widows". Remember that he is "in his holy dwelling" and that he "sets the lonely in families".

Basket of Giving

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2009

LEARN:

It took time with a group of orphans for me to realize where I was lacking in my life/spirituality. I didn't know prior to meeting them, that life contained so much more than I was willing to accept. After spending time with these boys I began to realize that I had 'capped' what I was going to allow myself to accept in life and to give in life. I saw that their 'basket of giving/accepting' was only stuffed with love while mine was full of so many worldly things- including my schedule and stuff, that only a small portion was left for love. In the few weeks I spent with the boys I received more love than I had ever received before. Helping orphans is not a one-way street... but rather a symbiotic relationship in which both parties can mutually benefit.

PRAY:

Thank the Lord for all the ways you have been shown that orphan's are ministers to those who minister to them. Thank you Lord for each and every orphan who willingly shares their 'basket of giving' . Fill them up Lord, with your blessings that overflow. Thank you that they are blessed in ways that we never before realized.

ACT:

Spend some time journaling regarding the ways your views have changed regarding orphans throughout the last 43 days.

Happy New Year

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2009

LEARN:

I couldn't think of a better way to bring in the New Year than having an arm around a dozing orphan and another asleep on my lap, while watching a pot of boot-hee* fry over a campfire. Two other campfires burned with fried boot-hee on either side of us, while clusters of children sang competitively, volumes increasing by the second. The countdown to midnight had those of us who had fallen asleep (including me), rubbing their eyes. "Happy New Year! Happy New Year! Happy New Year!" A prayer of blessing for the coming year followed and then we rushed to shake hands. "Happy New Year," the children would run up to me, excitedly shake my hand and rush off to bring good wishes to another before returning to shake my hand

again. The boot-heel was ready to eat and a big pot of tea was brought out. A little more dancing, a little more singing, a little more shaking of the hands... and then bedtime underneath the mosquito net while not exactly sugar plums danced in my head. My health paid for the campfire smoke later, but I wouldn't trade it for seeing those children smile and squirm with delight in sharing their holiday with us. There were three of us (Jacqueline, Joel and myself) who stayed that night and when the children found out we were staying at their house, they would run up to us, shake our hand and smile a smile of gold.

When a friend asked me why I felt drawn to going and returning to Myanmar, I responded "to bring hope to a country that has none." For over a year now, God has been defining "hope" for me, that it isn't wishful thinking but rather a life changing certainty that what is to come will indeed come. Something better is coming... guaranteed. Hope is what got Jesus through dying on the cross. You and me, we were on His mind. And He wanted something more for us, something better. I want something better for the people of Myanmar -- Freedom. Truthfully, I see my mission there is to love and encourage the children and adults. We aren't there to evangelize, and I believe I learn a great deal from the Burmese whose faith is tested daily. But I also know that for two weeks out of the year, those kids feel remembered and know tangible love with hugs, tickles, handholding and laughter. The leaders at the orphanage have a bit of a rest, too. I can't imagine their life -- day in and day out watching 150 plus children without a break. For two weeks, we have the awesome privilege of learning from them, of sharing God's Word, praying and praising together, laughing and dancing, and encouraging each other.

I couldn't sum the trip up in one word -- so here are two: warmth... and dust, physical attributes no less, but the words also echo deeper meanings. Sure, 80 + degrees is a little warm ... but being covered in children from the minute we arrive at the orphanages generates a life-giving heat. I listened to Sara Groves' song "When It Was Over" almost daily while in Myanmar with the line "love wash over a multitude of things" replaying in my head repeatedly. God's redeeming love can take a child tossed away by a family and bring peace, purpose and fulfillment. God's love can change the way we view others, can cloak our sharp words, can bring patience with each other. What does God want of us? Love. *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. **The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**" Galatians 5:6.*

Hopeful tan lines from my Chacos were washed away at night, mere dust lines. At the end of the day, we were all a fine sight to see - hair disheveled and clothes covered in dust. On the hour drive to the orphanages each day I always marveled at how even the tree leaves could be coated in such a thick rusty dust. God brought this dust to a deeper meaning for me through a song and scripture. "And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." Mark 6:11 (NIV)

This was quite the opposite of the orphanages we visited in Myanmar where we were welcomed and covered in warmth. Kiwi artist, Brooke Fraser, writes and sings of her visit to Rwanda in her lyrics "Albertine." She sings:

now that I have seen, I am responsible

Faith without deeds is dead

now that I have held you in my own arms, I cannot let go till you are

I am on a plane across a distant sea

But I carry you in me

and the dust on, the dust on, the dust on my feet

"Will you remember me?" the orphans ask us. I will not forget you. I will not shake the dust from my feet.

This is more than tugging at heartstrings. I'll be honest, I have to pray for compassion as it doesn't come naturally for me. But God has called us to look after the least of these, to care for the fatherless, the homeless, the widows. We all go about it in different ways... and I'm searching and praying through what my next step will be. Maybe it will be a career, but regardless, may loving others be a lifestyle for us all so that those around us will know Jesus.

PRAY & ACT:

Reflect on this scripture "*No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*" 1 John 4:12 (NIV)

(*pronounced booty – a gourd-like vegetable similar to zucchini)

God's Masterpiece

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2009

LEARN:

In 1998 Dr. John Kelly shared in a worship service about his experiences practicing dentistry in the Dominican Republic. While I had felt the call to mission work at different times throughout my life, something in his testimony about the way he was forced to trust God to work through him, despite language and cultural barriers, spoke to my heart and convicted me. Trusting God to direct my path, I committed to participating in a short-term trip to the DR with Solid Rock working on expanding a medical clinic. During that trip we were invited to spend some time at a near-by orphanage and I jumped at the chance.

While the conditions at the orphanage were difficult: the stench was overwhelming due to the non-functioning septic system, flies and other insects were abundant, many of the children were poorly clothed, most did not have shoes and many showed evidence of various diseases and infections, God's presence, love and spirit was everywhere. One young, autistic boy crawled up into my lap, wrapped his arms around my neck and never left go until it was time for our group to head back to town.

The obvious needs of the orphanage, coupled with the overwhelming sense of God's love and heart for each of those boys, convicted me that, as Ephesians 2:10 says, I am God's masterpiece and He had already planned and prepared me to be exactly where I was at that moment. This year, as I have every year since, I will return to my Dominican family at the Rose of Sharon Orphanage to share His heart, His love and His hope.

Sadly Danzy Garcia died February 16th at the age of 22. While we miss him terribly, we rejoice that he is dancing in the Light of Heaven (anyone who knew him knows how much he loved to sit in the sunlight!) I thank God for sending Danzy to wrap his fingers around my heart and not let go.

PRAY:

Pray that God will alleviate the sadness in this mission worker's heart at experiencing the death of an orphan he carried in his arms on many occasions. We thank you Lord that Danzy is truly dancing in heaven, in a body that no longer is encumbered.

ACT:

Although there is no medication that can cure autism, there are medications available for many childhood diseases that take the lives prematurely of children in third world countries. Please pray today for the health of orphans around the world. Ask the Lord to provide medications and treatments specifically to treat orphans who are afflicted with AIDS. Particularly pray for the needs of Art and Dorothy Helwig (international missionaries affiliated with Calvary) as they minister to those in Nigeria affected with AIDS. See the Calvary website for particular prayer requests:

<http://calvarysc.publishpath.com/helwig>

Christmas is for Kids!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2009

LEARN:

It was a Christmas shopping trip in 1965. I don't remember the store, what we were shopping for nor do I remember any other details about that day but I'll never forget the first time I laid eyes on the life-size teddy bear that grabbed my attention, and my heart. I have no idea why but as a 7 year old kid, I found myself wanting that bear with everything in me. However, it was far from tradition to get something we wanted for Christmas at our house; we got what our parents could afford along with understanding that having 8 kids meant ONE gift per child was the limit. And yet, for some reason I kept hoping against all hope that he would be mine.

I can't remember what I got for Christmas but I do recall is that it was not the teddy bear that had captured my heart but that was ok, I reasoned, it certainly wasn't anything I needed and I understood why my parents couldn't possibly get it for me. And then my brother who was visiting from NYC walked into our home with that very bear in his arms as my Christmas gift from him and Christmas came alive for me as a 7 year old kid ...

Christmas really is for kids, isn't it? The wonder of the season, the Christmas "magic," the surprises and the gifts, the baby in the manger and the stories that never grow old ... Christmas is for kids ... but what about kids that dream of a meal for Christmas or a warm bed or a safe place to stay? Or the ones that dream of a home with a family living together or those that long for a family to call their own? What about kids that don't know how to dream of hope, or of a Savior that loves them or of a place called heaven where life won't hurt anymore? What about those kids, is Christmas for them? Really?

The gift of God's love was meant for all kids but will the poor kids, the hungry kids, the lonely kids of the world get the chance to know anyone cares about them this Christmas? Is Christmas really for those kids? It can be; ask the Lord what's on His heart for His kids and what you can do to make HIS dream come true for one of His kids in need. Make sure that this Christmas is about kids... kids beyond our walls, maybe even beyond our region, kids in need... kids that God has on His heart and mind this year because I think He would agree that, **Christmas really is for kids!!**

PRAY:

Today, ask the Lord to help our church be an example of the Lord's love for orphans as written in Psalm 10:17-18 "The helpless put their trust in You. You are the defender of orphans Lord, You know the hopes of the helpless. Surely You will listen to their cries and comfort them. You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed, so people can no longer terrify them".

ACT:

Consider increasing your donation to this year's 1% offering, especially in any area that is helping orphans around the globe.

What Gets You Down?

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2009

LEARN:

I've been thinking about this since my trip to Myanmar last December; what gets us down. While we were in Myanmar we met Mary. Mary is the main mom at Agape Orphanage. In fact she started Agape Orphanage with her husband. Not long after they started the orphanage — about 10 years ago — he died from malaria. He got sick on Sunday, was in the hospital by Monday night and Tuesday morning he died. That was in June. In July her 11 month old son got pneumonia and within a month he had died. I'm not saying she didn't struggle or that she doesn't grieve. In fact even today when she talks about it there are tears. But she didn't quit following God's call to serve kids. In fact, in many ways she is the heart and soul of Agape Orphanage.

So what gets you down? This isn't one of those just-look-around-you-because-someone-is-worse-off-than-you kind of challenges. I'm not a big believer in alleviating my pain by finding someone in worse pain. What I am is a big believer in the virtue

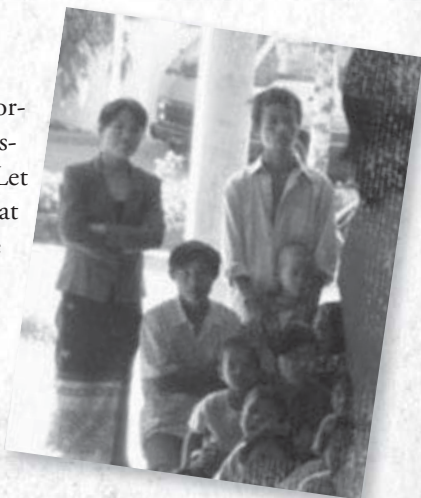
of perseverance. What I am is a big believer in the freedom we have to choose our attitudes. What I am — above all — is a big believer in God's ability to work in and through our circumstances to bring about good in our own lives. See I think that one marker of the current and future capacity of our hearts is how much it takes to get us to quit. One of the things I learned from Mary's example of caring for orphans is the value of perseverance. It's hard to win if you don't finish. So what gets you down?

PRAY:

God help me to persevere in my love for the orphans of the world. I don't want to be compassionate one moment and apathetic the next. Let my heart not only be broken by the things that break yours, but let my heart overflow for the children you love.

ACT:

Pray for Mary, a widow who is caring for orphans.



The Ministry of Play

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2009

LEARN:

So here is what I did on my Christmas Vacation 2008 – aka my short-term mission trip to Myanmar. I preached a message entitled Jesus is the One on Christmas Day to a gathering of 1500+ Buddhist Villagers and orphanage children, at least two Buddhists and one Muslim decided to become Jesus-followers that day. I baptized 30 people, including the three 3 day-new Jesus-followers. I preached a message on Sunday entitled The Church at It's Best and participated in an ordination service for two pastors and a missionary-evangelist. I met with the leaders of Calvary Theological Seminary, the school we have helped to start. I participated in a dedication service for the school building Calvary helped to build. I toured a Farm Center that Calvary helped to start and two orphanages that our 1% offering will help to build next year. Oh yeah, I also gave a talk on leadership to the first students of the Calvary school.

Meanwhile, among other things, Lynn and my children, Sarah, Katy, Jacob and Josh played with the children – everyday. They held children. They hugged children. They blew bubbles with children. They did crafts with children. They held hands with and tickled children. They bounced children on their laps. They played basketball with children and soccer with children. The children taught them rubber band games and how to count to ten. They laughed with children and did puzzles with children. They gave candy to children and broke up a couple of fights – usually over the candy. In other words they played.

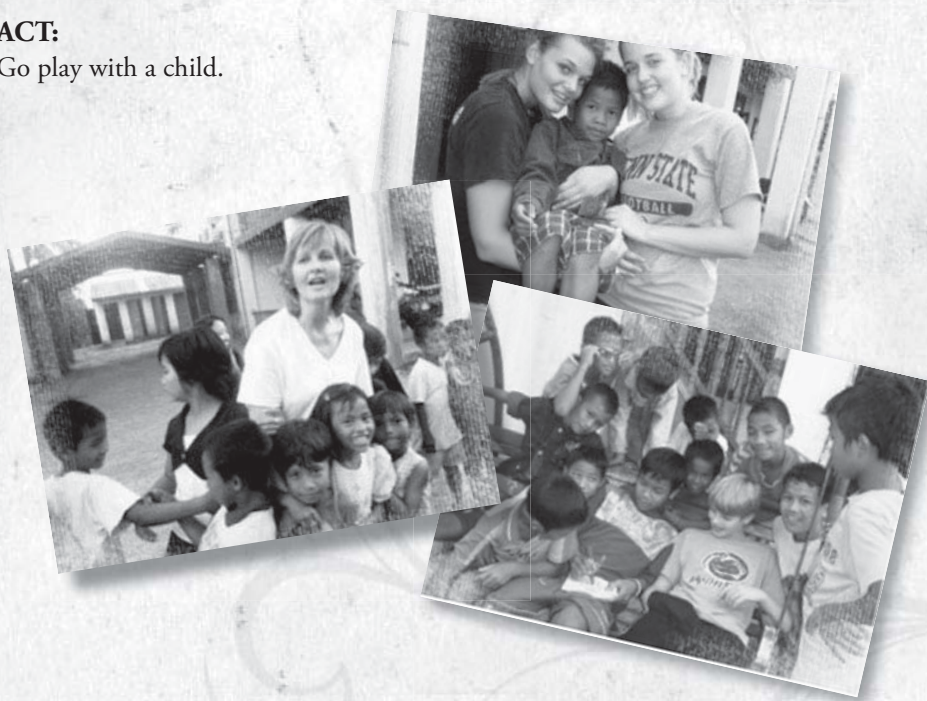
I will be honest – and I am not just saying this to make them feel good – their ministry was more important than mine. Anybody can preach and pray and dedicate and tour...but it takes someone who is great in the Kingdom of God to be able to play. And play is what those kids needed more than anything I brought. Playing with someone is a very simply, very profound, very innocent way of simply saying, I like being with you, no agenda, let's play. Think about it, Jesus said that we can't even get into the Kingdom of God, if we don't become like children. Don't worry I played a bit too, but the rest of my family did it better.

PRAY:

Father thank you for loving children and valuing play. Help me to have a playful spirit, to not be so serious all the time, as though the weight of the world rested on my shoulders. Help me to understand that in the economy of the Kingdom there may be few things more valuable than playing with a child.

ACT:

Go play with a child.



Christmas Morning

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2009

LEARN:

I'll never forget Christmas morning, 2008. Our family woke up early that morning, tired from many hours of travel, but eagerly got out of bed. There were no Christmas presents to open--in fact we were too tired to say "Merry Christmas" to each other. But we got ready quickly so that we could load up into the van that would take us to Agape Orphanage in Myanmar. We pulled



up to the orphanage, and were surrounded by kids who ran up to carry our bags and take our hands and lead us to the Christmas celebration they were having with the children from a few different orphanages, plus many from the village. I was immediately struck by how little they had materially, but how rich they were in so many other ways. When we sang worship songs, many of the kids would sing with eyes closed, hands raised, and tears streaming down their cheeks. When time was given to pray for each other, these beautiful children would surround US and pray for US. They served us at every opportunity, longing only to be with us and be hugged by us and hold their hands.

We played silly games, gave them presents of beanie babies and candy--and they each received one other present for Christmas. I watched with gratitude as my own children "got it"--they fully understood that day that it's not about receiving at all, but that true, lasting, deep joy comes from giving. Watching those orphans--so delighted with any gifts that they got, but still choosing our presence over any presents was truly humbling. We will never be the same!

PRAY & ACT:

Father, we thank you that you bless us with your Presence always. We ask for you to open our eyes to the things that matter to you, the things that are on your heart. Bless the orphans around the world, and let them know the joy of your Presence! Amen

I am His Child. I am Loved

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2009

LEARN:

I never knew that taking a trip to an orphanage would hit so close to my heart... would pry at my self-worth, would demand I examine my relationship with Christ, my view of God as Father and my identity as His child. Months after I returned from my first trip, it finally hit me... here I had grown up in a loving family – two parents, siblings... if I had a hard time accepting love, how much harder it must be for those who have had no tangible evidence of love in this world. I can't imagine not growing up with my family around me. And yet, as I delve deeper and deeper into the Word of God, I find the truth in that I'm not too different from the orphans... in fact, none of us are.

Through orphans, I have recognized the raw and real human desire to be loved – in my own heart... and in their eyes, their tight hugs, their shouts for attention. Ultimately, that love can't be met by anyone else but Jesus Christ. And that, that is what is so incredible! By His blood I have been bought. And by His blood I have been brought into the family of God. The biological blood family I love so incredibly much (and I thank God for!) is only a whisper of the family I am bound with for eternity, the family covered by Jesus' blood. This is the blood family that is lasting and permanent.

I remember when I returned from my first trip... the dreams and goals I envisioned, how I was going to provide this and do that and bring so and so to do this for them... Trying to save them, trying to serve them. Oh no, it was the orphans God used to save me from a life half-lived.

As I continue to serve at orphanages and explore what it means to care for them, there are times of frustration, exhaustion, anxiety... there are times when I want to save them. There are times when I want to provide for their every need ... but only one thing is needed... to be still... and know that He is God. I am His Child. I am loved.

PRAY: Thank you Lord for showing me your Father's heart for the orphan. Thank you for your willingness to patiently teach me and gently prod and poke me until I was willing to turn, learn, pray, and act.

ACT: Spend some time journaling today on what you have learned about your former life as an orphan, who is now brought into God's kingdom as His adopted child. What has Your Heavenly Father been teaching you? And are you willing to trust and obey and take that next step?

A decorative border with a repeating floral and vine pattern in black ink, framing the central text.

LEARN

PRAY

ACT