

## Our Greatest Need, Our Greatest Calling and Child-Inclusive Church Planting

— Rosemary Sabatino, Director

Over the past weeks I have been pondering a marvelous message given by Dr. Louis Sutton (then Sending Base Director of WEC USA). A few years back he was the keynote speaker at the acceptance ceremony of one of our newest team members. Our hearts were touched and encouraged by Dr. Sutton's comments as he highlighted the importance of *child-inclusive church planting*. My prayer is that your heart will be touched in kind as I attempt to reiterate the main points of his message and include a personal and much thought-out response. Dr. Sutton began by recalling, what he considered, the very core of Moses' message to the Israelites as they prepared to cross over to the Promised Land—*love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength* (Deuteronomy 6:5 NIV). He pointed out that our greatest need coincides with our greatest calling and he made three points:

- Our greatest calling is to love Jesus.
- Our greatest need is to love therefore we need someone to love with an ultimate love—someone worthy of love—this is God alone.
- Our greatest calling, to love God (Jesus), fulfills our greatest need.

How wonderful to realize that true ministry flows from our greatest calling, to love Jesus, and thus fulfills our greatest need!

However, it was the next portion of Dr. Sutton's message that impacted us so greatly. First he stated the second half of Moses' message: *these commandments that I give you today ... impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up* (Deut. 6:6-7 NIV). Then Dr. Sutton asked us to focus on the importance the Lord places on reaching, teaching and discipling children.

- God is child-inclusive as we see children are at the heart of His ministry.
- As God-lovers our church planting ministry must be child-inclusive from beginning to end.
- A healthy Christ-honoring church will have children at the center strategically.

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## IN FOCUS



## What Has God Been Saying All Along?

— Amy Wilson, Editor

When I was a missionary in Mexico City in 2009, my husband and I worked with street children. In an attempt to help get the children off the streets, we helped a local church open a community center. This particular church had an average attendance of 100 people weekly prior to the community center's opening.

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## Church Planting: What About The Children...continued

It was a joy to be so splendidly reminded that ministry to children, and especially to children at risk and in crisis, is integral to the church planting mission strategy! He asked us to consider the greatest need the children have; to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and strength. And, it is clear that this need can only be met as the church strategically reaches out to all children in their community.

However, if we consider that two-thirds of the 2.2 billion children in the world are children at risk and/or in crisis then it stands to reason that children at risk and in crisis exist in every culture, village, city, community and in many families. These children, who have been subjected to abuse, abandonment, neglect and/or exploitation, cannot understand the love *of God* (necessary for them *to love* God) because they have been so hurt by their fellow man. What a strategy of the enemy to deplete the church of tremendous resources and to stifle healthy Christ honoring church growth. How, then, can they be reached?

Praise the Lord these children can be reached! The church just needs the proper tools and training to learn how to minister to children affected by trauma and tragedy in order to reach them—just as they must learn how to minister to peoples of different cultures and mind sets in order to reach them.

Our heart at CCTI is to help empower the church to reach the children—the marginalized, poor and hurting ones—in order to bring them healing and hope so they can become children in Christ. Only then can they have their greatest need met and live out their greatest calling!

As I pondered the plight of the wounded children in light of Dr. Sutton's message I was reminded of the dilemma facing the early church in Jerusalem (probably the first church plant) in Acts chapter 6 verses 1-7. In an effort not to neglect the needs of the marginalized widows, the disciples appointed men *known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom* to carry the responsibility of meeting their needs. The result: tremendous church growth (*the word of God kept on spreading and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, Acts 6:7 NAS*).

Let us take to heart the example of the first *church plant* and strategically embrace the marginalized, the needy and the poor, and especially the wounded and waiting children—taking on what many today consider to be a risk. The result? We believe that, as we have seen in many places, the Lord will pour out His blessing and anointing and whole communities will be impacted for Christ. The kingdom will advance. The enemy will be defeated. The church will thrive! ■



### *Rosemary Sabatino*

*Rosemary Sabatino attended Columbia International University where her focus was Education and Biblical studies.*

*She currently serves as Director of Crisis Care Training International (CCTI).*

*Rosemary has worked with orphaned and abandoned children in Senegal, West Africa and has helped conduct CCTI seminars both globally and in the U.S.A.*

## IN FOCUS

...continued

Classes for children, as well as adults, were offered. The response from the children during the first week was amazing as more than 40 children came to take a variety of classes or to receive tutoring. The children who started attending the center regularly told their friends and families about the classes offered. Curious family members started checking into the center to see what it was all about, and many began taking classes as well. As the children began spending more time at the community center, they started learning more about the church and receiving invitations to come from the church volunteers who were teaching the classes. Many children from the center began attending the church regularly, which in turn led many more curious family members to come as well.



As a result of this one church stepping out in faith to reach the children in crisis and at risk in their community, there is now a typical attendance of over 300 people in this particular church. Additionally, another community center has been opened with a sister church, which has also seen substantial growth. All of this growth has occurred within a five-year period in an area that

is often known for slow progress! This particular example is our personal experience, but we know of many others around the world who have seen similar results, all because of children leading their families to experience the same positive and life-changing messages they are receiving.

With countless stories such as these, I am often so saddened and baffled when I hear of yet another church or another mission agency saying, “We only want to focus on church planting now; therefore, we are going to focus our energy on that and not on ministry to children at risk or in crisis.” Irritation builds up inside of me each time this is said, and this irritation used to be directed at these churches and agencies. However, God has helped me to see that my feelings have been misdirected. The irritation should be toward the enemy instead. Satan has devised a very clever scheme to take the focus off the children at risk and in crisis because he realizes the value that God has for them and what a vital part they play in His eternal plan.

As you read through this edition of “The Barnabas Letter”, I hope you receive a new or renewed passion to include children in crisis in your church planting effort. Please pass this edition along to others and encourage them that Jesus’ desire has not changed. *But Jesus called the children to Him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly, I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like little children will never enter it’* (Luke 18:16-17 NIV). ■

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES



*Dear Barnabas Friends,  
Our hope and prayer as you  
read this missionary's story is  
that you will see how power-  
fully God used the prayers of  
children. Please read this and  
be an encourager to children  
to keep praying and know how  
deeply valued they are by God,  
who loves them so! ~From  
your friends at CCTI*

*Dedicated to children who hear their Father's voice*

### *My Prayers Aren't Big Enough*

*—By Jenni Cockerham, Missionary in Uganda*

In August I started to feel like I had the flu. I walked to the nearby clinic and tested positive for malaria. Later I learned how severe the strand of malaria I had was—the kind that kills people. I took my four pills a day and waited. Those were rough days filled with fevers, sweats, blazing headaches, vomiting and lots of sleeping. My husband would walk by and put his hand to my mouth to check that I was breathing. I was switched to a stronger medication and struggled to keep down any food or medicines. At one point I was taking 20 pills daily. I was praying, but honestly, I was putting a whole lot of faith in the medicines to take care of this disease.

My prayers were not very big prayers. They sounded like, “Please relieve my headache, please let me get back to normal life, please help my husband care for the kids . . .” Never being the type who wants to inconvenience others, did I subconsciously not want to bother God for the big stuff? Probably. Or maybe I was fearful to place all my faith in full healing—what if I asked to be malaria free and instead continued to get worse?

Throughout my sickness, people came to pray for me. Sometimes I was so out of it and honestly did not know who they were. One of the sweet Ugandan mamas came to pray, and all I remember was her strong hand on my head and a powerful sense of God's presence. The second week was different. I was more alert and aware of the prayers being prayed. I was also more aware of the fact that the medicine was not appearing to work. I was aware (and even hopeful) that, though God does use medicine to heal people, I knew He could use prayer if He chose to do so.

Many more people came throughout this time, including 12 girls who prayed with tears begging God to heal me. I was told later that throughout my illness daily in class the children of Restoration Gateway prayed for me. Most of these children have seen people die and have seen people live, and often proper medical care has not been available. These children know that prayer has been the game changer. Their prayers sounded so different from mine. So bold, so FAITH FILLED, so powerful, so sincere, so convinced of the outcome. Not, “if it be your will,” with a weak, squeaky voice. Instead, confidently, “Please heal her, Lord, because You have the power to do it.”

That same weekend, in the US, a little boy went to church with his family. I woke to an e-mail from his mom: “At church tonight the pastor said he wanted to set aside some time for prayer. He divided the room into three sections. Our area was assigned



## My Prayers Aren't Big Enough...continued

to pray for people who are suffering with physical sickness. My son, Caleb, got so excited that he got out of his seat and turned to me saying, 'That's for us, Mommy! He is saying that for us because of Ms. Jenni. He wants people to pray for her!' Then, as the rest of the congregation silently prayed, my Caleb prayed out loud for you. He asked God to 'please really' heal her sickness. After he finished he looked at me with these radiant eyes and just shook his head. He could not believe our pastor had asked our section for that request."

Childlike faith. I was not praying with the confidence that this nine-year-old boy had. My prayers are not big enough.

I am certain that this little boy is NOT the only one in America praying for me. It is awe inspiring to consider the prayers of those who have lifted me before the Great Physician. Requests taken to the One who created this world and has the power to certainly heal someone with malaria, no matter how severe. As I learned of the prayers at Restoration Gateway and in the US ramping up on my behalf, I began sleeping more soundly and not having night sweats. I told my husband incredulously, "I think I am healed!?!"

Daily I become acutely aware of the fact that I am not in Uganda for Uganda's sake, but my own. God is using this place to teach me lesson after lesson. Trusting Him has been front and center. But this prayer thing, it is something in which I need to invest WAY more time and attention. God is not inconvenienced by my asking. He is big enough to change the weather, our health and our current difficult circumstance. In the past I have asked for the small stuff, and He has been faithful to enter in to the pain. Now more than ever, I recognize He has the power to heal the pain, and I have just not been courageous enough to pray the big prayers. I cannot be alone in this.

Do not get tangled up concerned that you might trouble God asking for the big stuff. Do not stay stuck or paralyzed wondering what it might do to your faith if He does not answer the way you are asking. Seeing this play out in my own life, I can confidently say, it is worth the ask! ■



***May you be a blessing and may you pray BIG, just like the children!***

### About the Author

*Jenni Cockerham and her family are new missionaries to Uganda. They are working with a children's ministry called Restoration Gateway (<http://restorationgateway.com>). Jenni frequently blesses others with her blog regarding what God is teaching her while in Uganda. You can follow Jenni at <http://jenni-100cupsofcoffee.blogspot.com/>.*



## *A Breakfast to Cherish*

—By *Natalie Flickner*

Today, let us look together at John 21:1-19. In this chapter, we see Jesus tenderly ministering to the disciples after the crisis of His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. These crisis events included the disciples' abandoning Jesus after His arrest and Peter's denying knowing Jesus three times.

In the passage, Jesus appeared to them for the third time on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, where their life together began. The disciples were back doing what they knew best - fishing. But once again their nets were empty until an unidentified man along the shore instructed them to throw the nets to the right side of the boat. As the disciples saw the fish filling their nets, Peter immediately knew Jesus was there. The moment he realized Jesus was present, Peter tore off his clothes and swam to the shore, not willing to wait another minute to be with Jesus. On the shore, Jesus had already prepared a hot fire ready to cook fresh fish from the sea.

Once the breakfast was devoured, Jesus turned to Peter and asked him three times if he loved Him. After each question, Peter responded, "You know that I love You," (John 1:15-17, NAS). Then Jesus gave Peter the charge to shepherd His sheep. At first glance, this is only a quiet conversation between Jesus and Peter. However, this conversation was extremely important. More than likely Peter was full of guilt and shame about his denial of Jesus. Without Jesus restoring Peter, Peter may not have fully understood Jesus' amazing grace and forgiveness. Not only did Jesus demonstrate forgiveness, but He also powerfully reaffirmed Peter's calling to build the church.

On the beach that morning, Jesus not only entrusted Peter to shepherd His flock, but Jesus also modeled shepherding. He modeled shepherding in three ways by finding, feeding and restoring His sheep. First, Jesus found His sheep. Jesus, being all-knowing, of course knew where to find the disciples. At the same time, Jesus knew the disciples as friends. As their friends, He would have known to find them somewhere they felt safe - the Sea of Galilee. Secondly, Jesus fed His flock. Jesus cared about the physical needs of His disciples. His great love for them caused Him to see and respond to their physical, relational, emotional and spiritual needs. No service was beneath the risen King. Thirdly, Jesus restored His flock. Peter was the only disciple

## A Breakfast to Cherish...continued

so excited to see Jesus that he jumped into the water to swim to be with Jesus. Peter clearly loved Jesus but needed to be fully restored. Jesus was intentional to communicate love, forgiveness and purpose to Peter.

As we seek to serve our risen King by shepherding His little lambs, may we follow Jesus' example of finding, feeding and restoring. ■



### About the Author

*Natalie Flickner has a master degree in Pastoral Counseling from Columbia International University. She is currently using her life experience of having Cerebral Palsy, in addition to her education, to write for CCTI. Natalie, her husband (Kevin) and their Miniature Schnauzer live in Columbia, South Carolina.*

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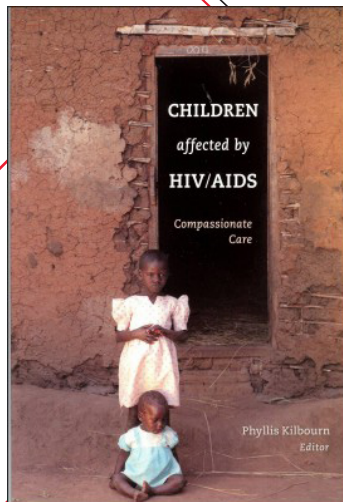
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Phyllis Kilbourn, Editor

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