

I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do (Jn. 14:12).

It was 2 o'clock in the afternoon at CCTI headquarters in Fort Mill, South Carolina. The sun shone out of a beautiful blue, Carolina sky; birds chirped outside my window. The world here seemed at perfect peace. Deciding to relax, I put the work before me at the computer on hold, took my bit of lunch and clicked on to YouTube and The Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. Soon the anointed voices brought the familiar lyrics floating across my ears in the unforgettable style that is uniquely Brooklyn Tabernacle. *If You can use anything Lord, You can use me. Take my hands Lord and my feet, touch my heart, Lord, speak through me. If You can use anything Lord, You can use me.* For a moment I was content. But, as the images on the screen, combined with the music, invaded my heart, tears flooded my cheeks and my perfect world was shattered.

The pictures were not horrifying or spectacular or that unusual, yet the Lord used them to speak to me in a wonderful and powerful way. There were ordinary people from all walks of life, many in their ordinary settings. Yet their acts of kindness and love seemed to propel them into the realm of the *extraordinary*. Children were carrying jugs of water. Doctors, nurses, police, firefighters, soldiers, veterinarians, teens, moms, dads, grandmothers, and many others—all were helping and ministering to those less fortunate and in need all over the world. The lame, the injured, the elderly, the sick, the hungry, the forgotten, the afflicted, the victims of war, disaster and plague all were being aided by those God placed near at hand or sent from afar.

Suddenly I saw the beauty of the body of Christ as He intended it—living the gospel, not just preaching it; being the hands and feet and heart of Jesus to multitudes—yes, and reaching to the *ends of*

IN FOCUS

—Rosemary Sabatino

the earth. It occurred to me that only as the Lord leads and guides and directs His people, and only as we respond to His call of compassion and sacrifice, can the great commission truly be fulfilled. It was as if Jesus was saying to me; I am at work, in your neighborhood, in your nation, and to the ends of the earth, as my church responds in my power to what I put before them. In this way they truly will fulfill my words: *The works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do* (Jn. 14:12).

For some of us the ends of the earth will be around the corner, and for others it will be around the world. But, for all of us He desires that we meet the physical and spiritual needs of the afflicted with His mercy and compassion, for He tells us: *Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, Now I will arise, says the LORD; I will set him in the safety for which he longs* (Ps. 12:5). There can be none more afflicted or in need of the Lord's rescue and restoration than the children of trauma, abandonment, exploitation, abuse, and neglect; children in crisis. These encompass the orphans, the street children, the children of war, the prostituted, the enslaved. This quarter *Barnabas* will focus on a place that is, for many of these children, the final horrifying experience of their traumatized life—*prison*.

Of the approximate 9 million prisoners in the world, at least 1 million are children. Many are incarcerated for such petty crimes as playing cards on the sidewalk, some for major offences. A great number are children of prisoners jailed along with their parents; others are imprisoned just because they are orphans or abandoned. An overwhelming number

are subjected to horribly crowded conditions, physical and sexual abuse, and illness and many die. Defense for Children International reports that, due to conflict with the law, many children live indefinitely in detention without access to fair judicial process, proper representation or someone to safeguard their rights. In many places children in prison are the forgotten ones subjected to a place where few wish to venture.

Our heartfelt thanks go to our contributing authors who are among those who do venture out to be a blessing to children in prison. In his article entitled "Locked Up and Labeled," Stephen McGoldrick gives us a candid look at the trials and triumphs of his ministry to child prisoners in Sierra Leone. Peter, working in Asia, renders a practical perspective in "Ministry to a Captive Audience." And Kathie Fitzpatrick's testimony will grab your heart as she recounts her time ministering to American child-detainees in "The Forgotten Ones." You will also be inspired by Father Shay Cullen's heroic rescue of child-prisoners in the Philippines. As you read through the following pages I think you may feel as I did: convicted by the great need and then encouraged by the transforming power of Jesus' love!

May His love inspire us, the church, to respond with sacrifice and compassion to those He places before us as we pray: *Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; then use us, we pray, as you will; always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

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Locked Up and Labeled

—Stephen McGoldrick

What have you been called? How has it affected you? Animal. Worthless. Stupid. Baboon. Hopeless. Waste of money. Waste of space. During our time working in the prisons in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Africa, these were just some of the labels we heard attached to the children incarcerated there. Hear a name enough times, and you start to live up to it. Get told enough times that you have no value and you start to believe it.

Jesus ... showed each person He met how greatly he or she was valued in His eyes ... we attempted to model the example of Jesus.

As a team we worked in two juvenile prisons in Freetown. One was a holding institution for 11–17 year-olds awaiting trial, while the other was the place the children were sent to serve their sentence. In both cases, the majority of our time was spent in helping the kids to see and believe that they had *value* and that there was a *hope* for their future.

As we look to the example of Jesus, we see that He showed each person how greatly he or she was valued in His eyes. We all need to know we are valued, and often we underestimate how our treatment of others shows the value we are placing on them. As a team we attempted to model the example of Jesus to these children in the following ways.

Listening to them. Children in prison are institutionalized. They have no choice about when to wash, when to wake up and when or what to eat. In a world where they are reduced to a number there is a loss of identity. They all have stories to tell, but often they do not get a chance to share them without being judged. Yet, their opinions matter, and listening to and respecting them is the first step in validating their value and teaching them to value others.

Loving them. There are numerous ways that you can show the kids that you care. We were able to visit the

prisons regularly, and that consistency was so important as we built relationships.

We realized that we didn't have to be able to speak their language to show them love. In the early days of language study, two of us went to the prison with needle and thread in hand and stitched the boys' torn, threadbare clothing. We spent two hours perched on bricks sewing filthy clothes that were more often hole than cloth. As time went on, some of the boys brought more clothes and joined in sewing their own. Others sat around chatting and encouraging them on. Our simple, and rather unskilled, act of love and care had brought about a change in atmosphere—sometimes God's glory comes down in the strangest ways.

Giving them boundaries. Loving can be hard! Even though these children had a very tough life, we realized that it would not be right to let them get away with everything. They needed to have clear boundaries, with consistent loving measures if the boundaries were broken. It was very important that the kids knew the boundaries and that we stuck by them. Each visit was a fresh start, and we tried to resolve conflicts the day they happened when possible.

We had a heart to encourage them and to show them that, despite all, they had a hope and a future.

Encouraging them. We all need to be built up and often our role was to be a “Barnabas” to the children in prison. We may not have known their family history nor all the knocks they had taken in life, but we had a heart to encourage them and to show them that, despite all, they had a hope and a future.

One of the ways we accomplished this support was to institute the “Top Guys Club” in both prisons—awarding merit points for good behavior, hard work, kindness and respect. This recognition reinforced positive behavior. Points were deducted for swearing, fighting or verbal abuse.

However, they were able to partially make up for the loss of points by apologizing or resolving the conflict. After all, they needed to know that there are consequences to our actions, even if we are sorry for them. At the end of a ten-week period, prizes were awarded to the boys with the three highest scores. The prizes were usually a certain amount of money that we would spend for them on the articles of their choice. For example, one boy asked for t-shirts from the secondhand market, while another asked for a pair of shoes.

Recounting the story of Michael may be a good example of how God used this kind of encouragement. For the first few weeks after he entered the prison, he was abusive, aggressive and rude. Because of Michael we had to break up many fights, and were on the receiving end of a lot of his verbal abuse. One of our workers came back to the office one evening and said, "I am not going there again. I've had enough." But we knew that our God is a God of second chances—that He does not hold things against us. We knew that this was the example we were to follow. After praying together, the abused worker was able to forgive Michael and to show him love the next time we visited the prison.

It took many months of perseverance before trust was built with Michael. Slowly we did begin to see a change in his attitude until, eventually, he became the one we could trust with our belongings (while another of the boys who was great fun with a good attitude managed to pick our pockets quite a few times). Michael worked hard in the math and English classes that we conducted, and he also came out with some really profound stuff during Bible study. He was the one who would come to us and tell us when one of the boys had been treated badly. He came to trust us, knowing, when he confided in us, that we would advocate for the boys and try to make a difference.

The day finally came when Michael, who in his first few weeks in prison made history by scoring the most minus points, won the "Top Guys Club" award. He was so proud as he received his certificate. He thought for a moment and then asked us to keep the money for now, because he was determined to win it the next time too—and he did! In a world where adults would withhold food and beat these kids with little provocation,

this act of trust was a huge accomplishment.

Giving them hope. Many stories in the Bible can easily get glossed over: David slept with a married woman and then murdered her husband; Moses murdered an Egyptian in a fit of rage. Yet God used both these men to serve Him and to do amazing things.

With Jesus there is always hope. Some of the children we knew were in for murder, rape, theft, etc. Yet we knew God loved them and wanted them to know Him as their Creator, their Lord and their Father. We wanted to show them that the Bible is full of stories of men and women who messed up, then, in repentance, turned to a gracious, loving God who redeemed them and used them

powerfully. We wanted them to know that these stories are amazing testimonies of a God who wants them, no matter how broken, shattered, bruised, or messed up they are.

To be sure, prison work is a humbling ministry. Trust takes time as one builds relationships with children who have every reason to distrust you. Sometimes you will get knocked down. But when you cry out to God for these children—for their pain, anger and despair—

God enables you to go back in to serve and love them, hoping that eventually the prison labels of liability will be replaced with Jesus' labels of love—

*Beloved,
Child of God,
Made in the image
of your Father,
Valuable beyond belief!*

*We wanted them
to know ...
the God who wants them,
no matter how broken,
shattered, bruised,
or messed up
they are.*

Stephen and Catherine McGoldrick are serving the Lord as missionaries with WEC International. They have ministered in Sierra Leone, Africa where they worked with Rainbows of Hope, a WEC ministry to children in crisis. At present, they are serving in the United Kingdom as they await their move to the DR Congo, Africa where they will be working with the WEC church planting team, training and disciplining youth.

Ministry to a Captive Audience

—Peter *

Working with children in prison is often one of the most overlooked ministries to children in crisis. I have worked with orphans, street children, and teens in prison, and judging by the numbers of workers and volunteers involved in those ministries, far more people are interested in working with orphans and street children than visiting the prisons. However, prison is often the very place where those same orphans and street children end up.

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In comparison with the challenges of other ministries to children in crisis, prison ministry is somewhat simpler. The location is already set, and you have a captive audience. There's no need to find the children—you can be certain where they are 24 hours a day. On the other hand, prison ministry definitely has its own unique challenges.

The first challenge of prison ministry is getting in. However, once you do get in, it is often difficult to gain long term access. From the very onset, be prepared to develop close relationships with administrative personnel, officials, and bureaucrats. This is a vital aspect of the ministry. These are the people who control your access to the prison. It will do you well to remember these folks on holidays and special occasions with a small but appropriate gift. Be unfailingly polite at all times and, above all, be patient. For example, in the first two years of our ministry, the volunteers often spent most of their time outside, waiting for permission to get in, only to be told after two or three hours that they could not enter that day. Persistence and prayer paid off. Eventually the prison administration became more open, and the gates that were formerly barred opened as well.

Even when good relationships have been established and entrance has been granted, expect sudden changes as familiar faces leave and new ones come in. In our situation, after several years, a change took place in the way the prison system was managed. The prisoners came under the department of justice, while the prison administration and guards came under the army.

Having to apply to two different governmental departments certainly increased our dealings with the bureaucracy. But all the same we were fortunate, because we already had good relationships with some of the people involved. Therefore, we were able to use our past involvement as justification for continued ministry.

Sometimes it doesn't matter who you know. For example, last year virtually all prison ministries were ended here when the government decided to heavily restrict which organizations and individuals would be allowed into the prisons.

The second challenge one faces is dealing with the oppressive atmosphere. The physical and spiritual conditions of prisons can often be overwhelming. Yet efforts to change those conditions are ineffective and can seem to be mere drops in the bucket. One of the primary goals in ministering to children in crisis is removing them from their hostile and dangerous environment. In prison, however, this is precisely what you cannot do. Do not underestimate the stress and strain (both spiritual and emotional) that this can create in yourself and other workers. Due to the atmosphere, finding workers or volunteers to even enter the prison can be very challenging. The thought of prison can induce fear in many people. Although, in four years of regularly entering the prison, neither I nor anyone else that I know of were ever hurt or even threatened.



The third challenge is that of discipleship. Many of the teenagers to whom we ministered simply "disappeared" after they were transferred to another prison or were released. In spite of the fact that we gave them our contact information, we never heard from or of most of them again.

* At his request, Peter's surname will remain anonymous.

Certainly we believe that God is faithful to guard and protect the Word that was sown in their hearts. But we also recognized that we had been given the commission to “make disciples.” In that regard, we could only pray that God would lead the right people into the lives of those who claimed to have repented and given their lives to Christ.

[Reaching out to the families of children in prison] would provide the church with a way to express the love of Christ.

Despite its challenges, prison ministry also presents a number of opportunities for outreach. While in some countries it may be possible to offer only a Bible study or something similar, in most cases you will likely have to be more creative in how you incorporate evangelism and discipleship into a program.

It is likely that any form of prison ministry will need to justify its existence to the officials and bureaucrats. The easiest and simplest way to do so is to provide some sort of education or vocational training.

To begin with, find out what educational programs are offered in the prisons. In many countries, there is probably little or nothing available, but it is worth finding out first what is provided. As it requires more material and resources, vocational training is more complicated so, if possible, start by providing educational services. Then progress to vocational training once you gain more favor with the prison administration.

Another program that would be especially beneficial if done in conjunction with the local church is an outreach to the family. Children in prison, if they have a family, usually come from hurt and broken families. In our context we estimated that 70 percent of the teenagers we ministered to came from either the streets or the orphanages. However, this means that 30 percent came from some sort of family context. In four years of ministry, I can only recall one boy who came from a family that appeared to be mostly normal. The families that we contacted were often single mothers who were divorced or who had been abandoned by their husbands. Alcoholism was common, and all were struggling emotionally, spiritually and financially. Ministry to these families would provide the church with a way to express the love of Christ and many would find this type of ministry less threatening than visiting prison.

On a larger scale, creating a half-way house for the children to re-integrate into society would be a complex but beneficial addition to a prison ministry. In our conversations with the teens, they often dreamed of what they would do once they were released. Mostly, they dreamt of drinking, partying and the like. I don't

remember anyone saying that they were going to do something constructive with their lives once they were released. Having been denied liberty for so long, the temptation to “live it up” and go wild is irresistible. Once the glamor of wild living wears off, harsh grim realities set in. Conflicts often arise in their families, or their friends may grow tired of residing in their home. Often they aren't able to find and keep a job, and pretty soon crime seems the easiest way to solve their money problems. Except, now there is less fear of getting caught—prison is a known factor and is no longer threatening.

We found that the repeat offenders were often out of prison for no more than two or three months. I know one boy who was out for only two weeks before he was re-arrested. Many came to view prison as a second home—they are fed and clothed, and nothing is expected from them in return except to sit quietly until they are released. Not so bad, considering where many of them came from.

Incarceration hardens people ... making the need for our dependency upon the work of the Holy Spirit all the more obvious.

A half-way house would provide a place for children to gradually re-enter society in a controlled, measured manner, as well as a place to continue the discipleship begun in prison. Too much freedom too soon will inevitably lead to poor choices that will place the child into the cycle of habitual offenses and incarceration. However, for a half-way house to function properly, it needs a well-trained staff who are able to handle the children and enforce discipline, and at the same time provide guidance and counseling. Additionally, location is a prime consideration as neighbors are not likely to look with favor upon it. And if they settled in a city or near one, the temptations of the street will often prove to be overwhelming.

It is no secret that incarceration hardens people, and children are no exception. This factor makes the need for our dependency upon the work of the Holy Spirit all the more obvious. You will need to constantly remind yourself that your task is not to be successful, but faithful, and trust God for the fruit.

Peter and his wife have been serving as missionaries in Asia for the past ten years where they are dedicated to helping the Church reach out to the marginalized and the needy at risk.

The Forgotten Ones

—Kathie Fitzpatrick



A dark region resides in the soul of almost every community in America—a mysterious building with bundles of razor wire at the top of the fence. While a world outside sleeps, electric doors open and close as police quietly come and go, depositing children. Unless you had a child arrested and taken there, you might never know it existed. It is your neighborhood youth detention center, U.S.A.

These are the unfortunate youth our society wishes they could erase and forget.

The youth who live there, or who are being held there until they face a judge who will decide their fate, are as young as nine years old, and the eldest are just under 18. Where do they come from? Some come from a violent family disruption. Others are being held for crimes as mild as truancy or forgetting to return a video, to arson, car theft, armed robbery, assault and even murder. These young people are the unfortunate youth our society wishes they could somehow erase and forget. They are deposited into youth detention centers across America, and are seldom visited by anyone who really cares or who has any answers for their life's condition.

In the Spring of 1997, the Director of the Yakima County Youth Detention Center in the state of Washington contacted our youth pastor, Russ, for help. "We built this 2 million dollar facility," he said, "but the county cannot afford to hire chaplains. Could you develop a team of people to come talk to the kids about Jesus and hold services?" Russ, could hardly believe his ears! When he announced the opportunity from the pulpit, I felt my heart swell, and that unmistakable tap on my shoulder from God. I spoke with Russ after the service, and my journey began.

We had nine people, both men and women volunteers,

in the original group. Time and again, unforeseen circumstances kept us from starting, and eventually our group dwindled. When we felt the Lord would have us delay no longer, without much of a plan, we finally held our first meeting in June of 1997. "I have led teams countless times," Russ said, "but, this time I'm scared to death. Let's pray." We did.

We split into three groups and walked in with nothing but our Bibles and our testimonies. As the youth filed in wearing jailhouse garb, looking dark and sullen, I breathed a prayer, "Jesus you'd better show up because we don't know what we are doing." And He did.

Facing a class of some 20 or more teenagers I smiled - "Hi, my name is Kathie. I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ at the age of 14 and it has been an awesome journey! We are here to talk to you about how you too can know God personally." They listened and many received Christ that night! That was 11 years ago and as of today thousands of youth have since responded to Christ and received Bibles and mentoring! Jesus has truly been the answer to their loneliness, fears, anger, drug addiction, teen relationship issues, and a whole list of insurmountable problems they seem to face.

It's a ministry that tugs at your heart strings.

At the beginning, Satan was not sleeping. He seemed to attack each team member in the form of unusual circumstances to hinder their continuation. I too felt those reverberations, but I was determined to stand firm and continue. After working alone for 1 1/2 years, God opened doors and led new men and women to work with me in Yakima County. As a result, the Young Lions Youth Ministry Program was born!

It is a ministry that truly tugs on the heart strings! The reward of seeing young people turn from a destructive

lifestyle to that of a positive, Godly path is truly amazing. We often encounter youth who need to regain trust after physical and/or emotional abuse that has come from a family member (father or stepfather). So, we must rebuild their image of a father by helping them to see that God is a loving Father who wants what is best for them, and that He truly wants to give them a great destiny if they will learn to trust Him and to build a relationship through repentance, prayer, Bible reading, and fellowship. We want them to know that they can have a hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11-13 are verses I often use.

Through a relationship with Jesus Christ they can experience the strength and power to actually succeed.

It has been reported that in jail ministry in our nation, across the board, the only lasting recovery comes from the outgrowth of the "chapel services," and the changed lives that grow out of that effort. Many people come into youth detention with programs that propose many "good ideas," such as "you should stay in school, you should not use drugs and alcohol, etc." However, when hit with life trauma, they are unable to comply in the natural alone. But, when combined with God's help and a relationship with Jesus Christ, they can experience the strength and power to actually succeed. What a difference once they have the right power supply, and they learn to use the Word instead of drugs or a weapon of violence. We developed a new slogan in youth detention chapel: "A new habit!"—as the kids raised their Bibles high with big smiles and new hearts!

My biggest reward is when happy, wholesome looking young adults, now in their twenties, walk up to me on the street and ask, "Do you remember me from juvy? I'm still with God—He's re-built my life!" They tell me of returning to school, going to college, or how their family was healed. Sometimes they are even married with children of their own. Most importantly, they are on God's path—not a destructive path. Yes, that is my best reward!



Kathie Fitzpatrick

Founder and director of *Young Lions Youth Ministry Team Program*, Kathie resides in Yakima Washington, USA. This faith-based, Bible - principled ministry has been designed for incarcerated children and teenagers. For those who have a heart to make a difference in their community, materials, help and resources are available at www.younglions.org.

Kathie is also the author of *Angel Promises: Remembering the Youngest Firefighter*—a memorial to her daughter, Karen Lee Fitzpatrick, who perished fighting the Thirty Mile Fire in Washington state, July 2001. The book is a compilation of the poems, essays, and inspirational wall writings of this young woman of faith who inspired many during her short lifetime. www.karenleefitzpatrick.com

Still Saving Kids Behind Bars —Fr. Shay Cullen

Several years ago, I was able to get inside some highly secured jails for the first time. I was so shocked by what I saw I couldn't sleep for nights after. The jail visits revealed children as young as ten being held in detention with adults. Many suffered degrading physical and sexual abuse, and some were even being sadistically tortured. Few knew about this terrible situation as it all happened behind locked gates and prison cells. I was determined to rescue as many as possible. Giving them toothbrushes and snacks and ignoring the violations of their rights was immoral. I had to act and with the help of the Juvenile Justice Network I lobbied and campaigned to end the jailing of children in conflict with the law.

Jubilee Action, a charity based in Guilford, Surrey, UK, and headed by Danny Smith has been instrumental in helping us greatly to develop public awareness around the world. This action led to a change in the Philippine law and the release and rehabilitation of hundreds of children. With ITV hidden cameras we got inside the jails and filmed the conditions and plight of these children. Hence the atrocities were revealed to the world.

Soon after the shocking revelations ... the Philippine Senate passed the long pending Juvenile Justice Welfare Bill. But the congress balked. Danny Smith persuaded ITV to come again. I got them into other jails where children were stacked like chickens in a cage. The second report showed that the terrible conditions of children behind bars still prevailed. Sickness, disease, malnutrition, physical and sexual abuse. Slavery thrived, as kids were "owned" by the cell bosses and worked for their food. This report was more powerful than the first and ... the Philippine Congress moved to finally pass the law.

Readers can view the ITV/CNN report on the Internet via Youtube, "CNN kids behind bars".

Hundreds have been released by compassionate judges but thousands across the county are still behind bars. Many are abused and even tortured in degrading and severely damaging ways. A few weeks ago we found three children in a police station cell with adults.

Their eyes showed fear, docility, and hopeless submissiveness. They were in shock and traumatized. What was done to them and what they had to do to please the adult prisoners is unprintable.

The kids were half naked, hungry, and malnourished and had scabies. They begged us to give them food and when they were released to us they broke down and cried and wailed for five minutes. We produced court release papers that transferred them to our custody; it was a day of hope and the beginning of happiness for them.

Outside they were clothed, fed and brought to the Preda Boys' Home. Here they are free to run about play basketball, swim, go to school and take an apprenticeship for trade. They learn right from wrong, grow in spiritual values and start life over. There is no need for walls, fences, gates or guards. The vast majority stays willingly and they regain their pride and self-confidence. This June 2008, twenty-four have been enrolled in high school and another fifteen are taking distance learning. These are the throwaway children of the society, lost sheep whose rights were trampled underfoot but are now found and restored to a life of goodness and dignity. Let's do all we can to help end the injustice once and for all.

Fr. Shay Cullen, nominated three times for The Nobel Peace Prize, founded The PREDA Foundation, in Olongapo city, the Philippines in 1974 - an organization dedicated to saving and healing abused and exploited women and children. His many articles and resources relating to children in crisis can be accessed at www.preda.org.

CCTI Web Site - Up and Running!

Click on to crisiscaretraining.org to access the new CCTI web site. You will find information on new resources and training opportunities, along with the latest copy of *The Barnabas Letter* (all back issues will be kept in archive). In addition, links to important resource and information sites will be at your fingertips.

Remember! We are happy to post any new resources *you* have available, including any upcoming training opportunities, along with your contact information.

Contact: rosabatino@aol.com or crisiscare@comporium.net

Caregiver's Time-out

—Marilyn Mertz



Shine ... Like Stars

On a cold winter night here in Philadelphia, the earth eclipsed the moon. A long dark shadow moved slowly across the moon's gleaming surface, blocking its light. In time this heavenly light was no longer visible. After an hour of watching and waiting, a thin glimmer of light slid out from behind the dark shadow. Slowly and beautifully the full-orbed brightness of the moon returned.

Sometimes we feel like a black shadow is moving across our lives. We may feel the pressure of desperate needs, constant demands and problems that seem to have no solution. They can drag our spirits down and make us despair that things will ever change. Not being able *"to see the forest for the trees"* (or the moon for the dark shadow) is an all-too familiar experience in my life. Under pressures, I feel mental and spiritual fog rolling in. I cry out to the Lord to clear my vision. I ask Him to show me where spiritual opposition is at work. If I can identify a spirit of fear, confusion or any other wrong element within or without, then I can pray according to the truth of His Word. *"The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil..."* —which include the works of his cohorts. If the "prince and power of the air" is the one keeping the dark shadow over the situation that concerns me, I can claim my rightful place with Christ beyond the darkness—and with Him I am in a place of victory.

Friends of mine, who are working in a hard place, experience frequent opposition but keep on going. Once when they were sharing a personal testimony with some parents and children, a harsh-faced official entered and listened. They were immediately concerned, knowing there could be repercussions. The next day their hearts were lifted when one of them received a comforting verse: *"Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD"* (Jer. 1:8). Even in the midst of what outwardly had not changed, they rejoiced in the hope and strength God was giving them.

In the darkness of that moonless night in Philadelphia, the planet Saturn and a myriad of stars and constellations shone more clearly. Standing out in the cold, we saw many more stars when the heavens were at their darkest. God desires to give us songs in the night—songs we would otherwise never learn. These songs built on truth and light fortify us and carry us through the darkness. There will come a day when full light shines again. Until then we must live in hope. Our hope comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. It could not be established on a firmer foundation than the God of all creation. His faithfulness is established in the heavens (Ps.89:2).

Do you hang onto hope? Do you allow God's glorious creation to encourage you? The heavens declare the glory of God. The tiniest forms of life do as well. Stop and study that fragrant blossom. Marvel at the bees that carry the pollen to fertilize the fruit that feeds the world. Breathe in the beauty of a sunrise. Enjoy the warmth of the sun. Let the wonders of God's creation minister freshness to you—body, soul and spirit. Do not let the tremendous need around you be your all-encompassing focus. Let God lift you up, fill your vision and renew your hope. Do not allow injustice or lack of resources to drag you down. These are not eternal. With God you will make progress in spite of those things that make it seem impossible. He promises to make a way in the wilderness. He will make the valley of Baca a place of springs (Ps.84:6). He will refresh you with His sweet water, wipe away the tears and put a new song in your heart.

Paul admonishes us to do everything without murmuring so that we may become blameless and pure, without fault in a crooked and depraved generation—a place where we shine like stars in the universe as we hold out the word of life... (Phl.2:14-16). Do you know you are meant to shine like a star as you reflect the love God pours into you? Unlike diamonds, stars are never dull or tarnished. A diamond, only when cleaned and polished, glistens in the sunlight and casts rainbows all around. The Holy Spirit is ready to search us deep within so we can be sure our sinful hearts are not hiding anything that contributes to a problem. With our permission, He will run a "quality check" to search our hearts, so we can walk in full light with humility and confidence, knowing that we are indeed shining truth and goodness into our generation.



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