

snapshot.

a glimpse of Life!



February 2010

I've Seen it All Before



I was in El Salvador a few weeks ago on a Compassion Vision trip. My reason for going was to introduce some friends to the work of Compassion International. It's an awesome work I believe in, and for the last 15 years it's been a part of my ministry to students, to provide them an opportunity to partner with Compassion by sponsoring a child. Compassion's goal is to release Children from poverty in Jesus' name by getting sponsors and ministering to the children through a local church. This was a trip to see that in action.

To be honest, my heart was saying, "I've seen this all before." It wasn't even as if I was taking it lightly; it was just that I was so busy supporting this great ministry and calling others to support it or get involved, that I didn't see my own need and how God had sent me on this trip for me. I always want to do something for God, which isn't bad in itself, but I easily forget that He wants me to be in relationship with Him, the God of the universe, even more every day.

The verse I read before our first project visit was 1 Corinthians 13:3: "And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." What if I give all I have to the poor, if I get people signed up, if I get kids sponsored? How can you do that and it not be love? But I get so into what I'm supposed to do, that I forget who I'm supposed to be, who God has created me to be, and what he created me for... a relationship with him, to love him, worship him, and enjoy him.

Even ministry can become cold and callused and a form of legalism – an attempt to somehow please or appease God. This can happen when it becomes just a program and you don't see the faces behind it.

Take Haiti, for example. Yes, we are moved by the vastness of the tragedy, and many had their heart strings tugged enough to give. I am so thankful for that. But now compare that situation to one where you personally knew someone in Haiti and you wanted to know if they were okay. The immense burden and intensity of those emotions pale to the others. The two scenarios bring me to the point of asking if I really care. Do I have compassion for them, or do I just feel sorry for them and give a small gift to appease my sense of guilt? Did I do it so the next time I hear someone asking me to give I can tell them I did... basically saying, "Leave me alone; I did my part?"

So there I was, walking into a Compassion project with 171 children in yellow shirts, their "uniform," and each one is waving a brightly colored balloon to welcome us. The smiles melted my heart, and then they sang a few songs. My heart said, "It is working," and I felt good about being a part of this great work. I was so glad my friends were seeing it.

Then the director asked me to step away from the crowds and pray for one student. "Sure," I respond.



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The girl I was asked to pray for is maybe 5 or 6 with dark black hair pulled into a pony tail. Her deep brown eyes would melt anyone as they said, "Papa!" I knelt down to get to her level and she reached to grab my hand as the director of the project told me her story. Her mother had died when she was young, and she lived with her Papa whom she adored. But just two weeks ago he was on the bus coming home from work and he fell asleep. Some gang members attacked him, cut him and broke his neck. The director told me, "He died and she is now an orphan. Could you pray for her?"

I have seen it all before? My heart swelled. This isn't an "it." This isn't about a project, or poverty, or getting sponsors. This wasn't about a ministry or someone's vision. This was about a child, a person with a heart and hurts and longings. She is in a situation I can't even imagine, facing what a child should never have to face.

I no longer had to wonder what my heart would feel if this happened to someone I knew... I do know her now. She was holding my hand. Only then could I get a glimpse of what God feels for her. Never before have I felt so inadequate, so hopeless, and so angry at the effects of poverty. There were no feelings of having done enough. Instead, I felt compelled to do anything and give everything. Yet I couldn't do anything to take away her pain of losing both parents. I don't understand what happened next, but as I stumbled over my words in prayer and the tears from the director, the girl and my own joined as one on the ground, and our hearts cried out in desperation together as equals, it was as if I was in the presence of God himself.

This is not about anything but worship. And until we see real people and not projects, real children and not tragedies, we will not see Jesus. Until we see Jesus we'll continue to callously say, "I've seen it all before," and we'll become just another organization with big budgets and grander boasts of what we have done. Instead, this visit ended with two little arms wrapped around my neck. To be honest, I haven't been so close to Jesus in quite some time.

For the Kingdom,

Bob Lenz
International Speaker

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