

The Curse Of Poverty

Saturday, 15 November 2008

In Luke chapter 4, Jesus went to the Temple on the Sabbath day, stood up and began to read from the scroll. It was an announcement of His mission and began with the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor..."

During the 1970's, the nation of Uganda, once known as the "Pearl of Africa", was ravaged under the cruel dictatorship of Idi Amin. Those nightmare years were followed by regimes not much better whose soldiers openly pillaged and plundered the countryside. This was the state of affairs when I arrived in 1983 with my young wife and six-week old son. The economy, if you could even call it that, was in shambles with the vast majority of the population living in fear and extreme poverty. Truly God's hand of grace and protection was upon us during those terrible years. As hard as it was for us, it was even more difficult for the Ugandans who were in a fight for survival. They not only had to contend with the volatile situation in the nation, but with the devastating effects of horrible poverty.

Things did begin to improve toward the end of the 80's, but as a missionary living on the field, the greatest challenge and most heart-breaking thing I had to deal with was the poverty of the people I had been sent to serve. Most of the Africans I met, and came to eventually know and love, were desperately poor, no running water, no electricity, very limited healthcare, and maybe worst of all hopelessness. I came to hate poverty and knew it was not God's will for His people, or any people for that matter, to live under those conditions. What kept me going was the fact that we were able to see some great successes in the area of spiritual transformation among the people. But because I was unable to effectively facilitate physical transformation, I never felt like I had accomplished all that I should. I guess the word that best describes my time in Africa is "bittersweet".

Earlier this year, I began to hear about something called microfinance. What got my attention were the testimonies of poor people no longer living below the poverty line, all because they had been given a loan which enabled them to build up their small businesses. The whole concept of loaning to the poor intrigued me. I know firsthand that perpetually giving handouts is not the answer, and in fact many times makes the situation worse, even creating dependency. As I continued to read and research everything I could get my hands on about microfinance, even taking a graduate level-course, I came to the conviction that microfinance is a tool for empowering the poor - something already proven to defeat and eradicate poverty. I have every intention to utilize microfinance to the fullest extent possible as soon as Vail and I get situated in Africa. Our recent trip only confirmed God's call and we are eager to move as quickly as possible. Already some powerful and strategic partnerships have been formed I will be telling you soon.

Jesus paid the price for us to be free from sin, sickness, and disease - but He also defeated poverty and made provision for His people to live in true prosperity. True prosperity involves so much more than just the financial realm, affecting even the physical, social and spiritual realms as well. In fact, Scripture tells us we can gain the whole world and lose our own soul, which to me simply means you can be filthy rich and still go to hell if you don't know Jesus. The unchanging truth is without Jesus there is no real prosperity, and not knowing Him is the ultimate form of poverty.

I will be sharing more about microfinance in the weeks and months ahead, and look forward to getting your feedback. Together, by the grace of God, we will live to see poverty defeated in the nations on a grand scale for His glory and for His Kingdom!