

Greetings from Uganda!

April 5, 2011

It is striking how age just creeps up on us and we never notice ... till we get a host of lively new "short-termers" around and it slowly begins to dawn that most of our children are older than any of them and that we have been a Christian longer than any of these new young friends have been alive. Perhaps this little "mid-life crisis" will be nothing more than a momentary lapse.

Yet more insidious than age sneaking up on us is the way one's heart can grow callous to the pain and misery of people close at hand. Maybe it's just a coping mechanism that kicks in since we are immersed in it and since so many stories we hear day after day from the people we work with are filled with events that tear our hearts to shreds. But it is probably not as benign or simple as a mere "coping mechanism."

Every now and then, however, God mercifully brings along someone whose voice, like a splinter piercing through my calloused hands, penetrates and strikes something tender. Please allow me to tell you about a phone call I received Sunday night.

We had a student in the ACTS program whose name is Isaac. During class one day he began to weep. I didn't think much of it at the time because we were witnessing God work deeply and differently in the students' lives. During this particular class we were discussing Romans 15:7 where Paul tells the Roman believers to "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you."

After class Isaac came up to me and asked if he could go home (2 hours away) and try to find his father. He said it was urgent - that God had shown him in that verse that he needed to find his father and forgive him for what he did to him when he was a boy. He didn't elaborate but only told me that every time he takes a shower he is reminded of what his father did to him. Knowing what I know about domestic life for many here, I thought it best to let him go.

When he returned a few days later he was full of joy and told us that after many years of living as if his father were dead, he finally found someone who knew his whereabouts and his phone number. Because he had moved to a distant town, Isaac was only able to call him. He told his father that he forgave him for what he had done. Deeply moved by this, his father told him that he was happy that time and maturity had brought him to the place where he could forgive him. Isaac quickly corrected him and told him that it was neither time nor maturity but the gospel that enabled him to forgive him and even consider finding him. Later in the conversation his father repeated the time and maturity thing and Isaac adamantly rejected this as the reason. He told him that it is only because Jesus had welcomed him that he was now able to welcome his father back into his life.

Below is a picture that Isaac drew of the stages of his life that lead him to ACTS. I assigned this on the first day of the program so that we could use it to get to know each other. One by one we told our stories. Providentially, Isaac's story was delayed until after he returned

from his safari to locate & forgive his father. As he began to tell his story I began to weep and marvel at the power of the gospel and what it meant that Christ has welcomed me.



The story begins with the boy in the center fat and healthy. But his father decided to run off with the wife of his mother's brother. As it goes here, the father took the children with him. And as it also goes here, the step-children of the new wife suffer serious neglect and abuse.

Knowing how her children were suffering, Isaac's mother one day brought him a piece of soap and a small bit of food. His father found out and beat him to the point of death. The picture of the boy hanging by his feet over a fire is apparently how it happened. The next picture is him on the ground left to die in his own blood. After he regained some strength, he ran away to his mother who struggled to see him grow up and educated. The other pictures show that, by the grace of God through the love of his mother, Isaac became a music teacher, got married, and they had a child.

Now remember that this assignment was given on the first day they arrived. So, the point at which this picture was drawn, his father was still dead to him. The whole left half of the drawing, with the fruitful tree, is Isaac's life without his father ... or without anything but hatred for his father.

Sunday I went with some university students on an “outreach” at a secondary school in a village not too far from Mbarara. As I was driving home, bouncing (literally) along the red dusty road, listening to the students sing, Isaac called. He told me that there was someone who wanted to speak to me. I thought it may have been his pastor or someone else I knew from his town. But when the man introduced himself, he introduced himself as Isaac’s father. Because I didn’t know his language and he knew only a little English, we were not able to say much to each other. But when the phone was passed back to Isaac, the sound of the joy in his voice said it all. The two were reunited! But what is more, they were rejoicing **together** at the birth of Isaac’s newborn son, Blessed Aineamani.

The moment of that phone call was surreal. In one ear was the spontaneous singing of the students in such glorious harmony that I have to wonder if it could ever be repeated again this side of heaven. In the other ear was the sound of joyful Isaac holding his son with his father standing beside him. I can’t help but wonder if the breathtaking sound of the singing was God’s way of giving a glimpse of the joy of heaven at that moment. The good shepherd found his lost sheep! Three generations restored because the sovereign Spirit brought home, in a fresh way, the reality of how Christ had welcomed Isaac ... which immediately awakened in him a desire and capacity to seek out and welcome his father as he had been welcomed. The gospel alone has the power to do that.

Prayer Requests:

- 1) This is Charis’s last term at RVA. Pray she can finish well and transition back to life in America.
- 2) We started a study through Romans in town two nights a week (Thur. and Fri. evenings from 5:00-7:00). It has been greatly blessed by the Lord. It is the first time most people have ever heard a book of the Bible taught straight through. I’m asking that you pray for the Lord’s continued blessing. It will last until we return home in July.
- 3) We intend to return home after Charis’ graduation in July and will be there for close to a year. This means losing some momentum in recent & significant ministry developments. Pray we can end this first term well and bring proper closure to the many things we are doing for our long furlough. Pray also that our time with family and friends once we return will be rich.
- 4) Susan will be finishing up her studies with two groups of girls. Pray that the girls will continue to grow in their relationship with Christ – learning to trust Him with all their heart & seeking to honor Him in all their ways.
- 5) Pray for Isaac and his family, especially his father. I’m sure he has left a trail of devastation he needs to work through.

We look forward to seeing all of you when we return.

With deep gratitude and love for you all,

Mike & Susan Boyett