

Why Go to Rwanda? From the Journal of Somesh Mitra

It's a question I asked myself in the days before I boarded the plane to Rwanda as part of IECC's annual mission trip. Being a young Christian, barely three months on the job as it were, I suddenly wondered whether instead of spending the thousands of dollars to make the trip in person, I should rather donate the money instead.

Several questions and thoughts crossed my over-active and somewhat inherently skeptical mind. What could I say and do, coming from my comfortable and sheltered background, that could possibly help anyone who has gone through the horrors of genocide? Instead of spending the several thousand dollars I spent to make the trip in person, wouldn't donating the money be a more valuable gesture of practical help? Even if I do go along with the team, as a young

Christian, will I be mature or knowledgeable enough in the scripture or leading in prayer? Why do I have images of The Great White Colonial Missionary (even though the team was primarily Asian origin) going to the "uncivilized masses" to preach and judge others from a "holier than thou" standpoint? What am I going to tell my friends and family who are mostly non-Christians? And most importantly, even with all these questions, doubts and cultural prejudices and stereotypes, why did my heart tell me I should go to Rwanda?

Finally I got it. This trip was not about what I could "do to help". This trip was a calling from God for whatever His purpose was for me. My human intellect will never be able to fathom why I should go there, how I would react and respond to whatever is out there in Rwanda, and what if any the potential impact might or might not be of me being there. Only by taking that step of faith and trusting God would I be able to open my heart, to open my eyes to see, and to open my ears to hear.

Now at peace in the decision to go to Rwanda, my (over-active) mind turned to looking at the question from another perspective. Coming from 35 years of proud Hindu / semi-atheistic background and now turning to Christ as my Saviour, I thought about how I could approach this question from a non-Christian and a Christian worldview based on my experiences in Rwanda of God's work.



For a non-Christian

If you have any doubts about whether God exists through the person of Christ, or you want to at least ask the questions of our purpose and meaning of being in this world, go to Rwanda. If you, like I once believed, that there is no hope for Africa, go to Rwanda. If you truly want to see how people are able to overcome horrors that you cannot have imagined to exist on this earth in this day and age, go to Rwanda.

Even the most hard hearted, skeptical, "rational" non-Christian (believe me – I know what that's like) will be forced to ask the question: "how?". How could it be that a people who used to live side by side in harmony and turned on each other in the most brutal of ways, now be reconciling their differences and learning to love each other? How could it be that people who have so little – little money, little education, little hope – be so contented and joyful?

How could it be that in other African nations, where there have been secular NGOs for decades doing fantastic humanitarian works, yet still don't seem able to make long-term sustainable improvements in the roots of the societies they work in? How could it be that a small Christian mission like YWAM start with nothing and in five or six years manage to transform street kids and child soldiers into leaders that reach out and mould lost youth into footballers, teachers and Cannes-nominated film producers?

When you realise that the common thread amongst all of these seemingly impossible situations, is a strong, deep faith in the power of Christ's healing and grace, you might at least have to consider that there might be something in it after all. It becomes even more interesting when you consider that in developed nations, we spend countless resources and entire lifetimes making a drama out of seemingly minor things compared to the traumas and tragedies experienced by so many in Rwanda. As a former non Believer I, like many, had a tendency to believe that we don't need God, that we can count on our own inner strength and be "supermen/women" to deal with anything life throws at us. Our Rwandese brothers and sisters show us another way: the power of faith in Christ, of uplifting our troubles, pain and sorrows to Him, and the true meaning of transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit.

For a Christian

If you want to witness God's miracles, in this day on this earth, go to Rwanda. If you want to understand what grace truly means, go to Rwanda. If you want to witness the work of the Holy Spirit on a society and country level, go to Rwanda. If you are discouraged and disheartened by those around you – both Christians and non-Christians – who don't seem to have that spark, that joy of life and of living, that light of Christ in their faces, go to Rwanda.

Even the most mature, dedicated Christian cannot help but be touched by what's happening in Rwanda. Of course the picture is far from rosy – there is still so much pain, suffering and spiritual attacks prevalent in the country. Things will not happen overnight. Yet amidst all the darkness, the Christian in Rwanda can see so much light and hope, often through everyday small miracles, like a child managing to make it to school everyday. Then of course there are the bigger miracles, like our African brothers and sisters getting their calling from God to go out and help fellow Africans by setting up missions in remote parts of the country, vehicles of God's love and grace.



As a Christian, one of the things I find difficult is having true faith that God will provide, and truly trusting that when He calls me to fulfil some purpose, that I should drop everything – especially my intellectual challenge and self doubts. The other thing related to this is my difficulty in hearing God's word and recognising the call in the first place. Perhaps this may resonate with you. Our Rwandese brothers and sisters show us how to worship and pray, and show us how to truly have faith and trust in Christ and His provision when they hear their calling. We only have to witness brother Sylvan's calling. He runs a new church, a HIV/AIDS ministry, widows ministry, an orphanage with 12 kids with amazingly solid characters, as well as having his own family – his wife Louise, daughter Esther and baby son Isaac. Yet he still believes he can do more for the glory of God! Sylvan and Louise are a testament to having deep faith in their calling and that God will provide.

The theme of the IECC team this year was "Building our house on solid rock" (Matthew 7:24-25). This trip for me truly opened my heart, my eyes and my ears. My Rwandese brothers and sisters through God's extraordinary works, showed me as a Christian that I truly need to start rebuilding my own house on solid rock, and that transformation is indeed possible with Him.



FEELING GOD'S HEART IN AFRICA

So should you buy a ticket to Rwanda?

Ultimately, I can't answer that – and in fact, I realise that I haven't really answered my own questions. Whether you physically go to Rwanda or not to witness the works of God is a matter for prayer between you and God and his plan and calling for you. What I have come to realise though is this. There is a Rwanda everywhere you look, even in your own neighbourhood or your own household. It may take a different shape or form and not be as brutal or shocking as Rwanda's history, but there is always some darkness to be found when you truly open your eyes to see it. What Rwanda and my brothers and sisters there have taught me is that through Christ comes light in the darkness, and I pray by God's grace that I have retained with me at least a reflection of that light of Rwanda to share with those around me – my family, friends, workmates, Believers and non Believers. To non-Christians, I encourage you to open your eyes and find the Rwanda close to you, ask the questions you need to ask and see if you are truly satisfied with the answers. To Christians I encourage you, however dim or bright you feel your light is, to find your Rwanda and shine.

...I LIKE MANY HAD A TENDENCY TO BELIEVE WE
DON'T NEED GOD



A Year of Harvest and Encouragement From the Journal of Duncan Tang

Seek HIS Kingdom first - The year of 2009 is a big change to my life!!! I got married earlier this year and have invited our Rwandan brother, Serieux and Noel to witness our marriage. I shared the testimony with HK family and friends about men's devotion in Africa that started 6 years ago and how God has answered my prayer by sending his beloved daughter, Rosalyn to become my wife. Though there has been a lot of changes in my banking career this year at the outset of the financial crisis, God always takes care of me and reminds me of His word "...seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Harvest Year - This year was a harvest year in my walks with our Father Lord. It was the first year I went to Rwanda no longer as a single individual but as a couple. Also, I have witnessed a few of my sisters who have gone to Rwanda in 2005 with me bringing along their husband or their fiancé to revisit this blessed land.

Be Content - The greatest gift I received is "love" and "passion" from the brothers and sisters in Rwanda. Despite the difficulties in their lives, they fully demonstrate the biblical meaning of "contentment" – keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God promises that "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you." (Hebrew 13:5). I feel peace and joy whenever I look into the big eyes of the children. Their passion for love always reminds me to treasure every moment and our relationship with our families and friends back in Hong Kong.

New Life in Christ – Although I have already been back to Hong Kong for a month, I still remember the scene when I visited an old widow named Jacqueline in the village. I broke out into tears when I heard her testimony of how her life was being changed after she accepted Christ. She told us how her life was transformed from a "hopeless life" to a "new life" received from Jesus. She now lives with the eternal "peace" in her heart every day. This reminded me how internal peace is far more important than any earthly possession. Although she once had a tumor in her mouth and suffered huge pain and serious coughing, she prayed with us with joy and peace and proclaimed our Lord's name loudly. Thanks Lord for letting us meet your faithful servant, Jacqueline in this trip.

Foundation on a Solid Rock – as we have shared with our brothers and sisters, this year is a year of building solid foundations for the seeds that we have sown in past few years. We were delighted to see different brothers and sisters coming to serve this land and preach the gospel to the streetkids, widows, AIDS patient and prostitutes. Praise the Lord, we witnessed many of our friends after graduating from DTS has decided to devote themselves in God's work. We also witnessed the setting up of a new Christian based foundation aiming to restore and empower the lives of youth and children at risk through social rehabilitation.

Our Mission - same as every year, I have to close my letter with my favourite verse which is painted on the wall of the dining hall in the YWAM base in Rwanda: "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20). Lord, a million thanks for taking us out of our comfort zones and let us to be part of your salvation project in this world once again.

"THE GREATEST GIFT I RECEIVED IS LOVE..."



A New Heart From the Journal of Mandy Leung

Four years ago when I went to Rwanda, I came back with a new heart. God finally answered my two gnawing questions: What is my life purpose as a Christian and what special plans do you have for me Lord? In Kigali, I witnessed the Rwandan's visionary hearts and their passion for doing God's work: Noel wanted to go to film school in South Africa and be able to make movies to showcase Rwanda to the world, Gabe wanted to take art school in Hawaii, Gabe's wife MK wanted to take counseling studies in Hawaii with the dreams of one day returning to Kigali to minister to families and teens in YWAM's Harvester's ministry who dreamt of becoming music artists, filmmakers and entrepreneurs. Despite their lack of resources, I was inspired by their great faith and hope in God. I went back this year with a seeking heart to serve God in my family business.

Over the years, fear set in my heart as I began to worry about whether I could take over my family's business and whether I had the skills to accomplish the work that God placed me in. Gradually, the journey that God intended me to walk became a personal struggle of exercising my own strength on building security around these fears rather than exercising true faith in God just as He showed me through my Rwandan friends in 2005.

This year going back to Rwanda (with a husband), God gave us both new clothes and a new heart. Last time God transformed my perspective, this time He enlarged and deepened it. He gave me the desire to seek more of His heart rather than just plans for my own life. When our Hong Kong team was commissioned by Will Pritchard this year and as he prayed that God would show us who to specifically minister to, God gave me an image of 4 years ago when we were worshipping with the street kids in a wooden house with our friend Rafiki. Specifically, I saw a boy with a red shirt half off his shoulders. In the end, as I looked for this boy in Rwanda, it was not important who this boy was because there were several boys who wore red: an orphan boy named Patrick at Silvan's orphan home, the street kid who followed us while visiting the fields near the Gahunga village, and a street kid who approached me while the men on our team played soccer with street teens. The sense was not about anyone specific but God gave my heart eyes to see into the needs of orphaned kids and street kids. Kids who had no home, who had no hope and no future, kids who were fatherless and motherless, kids who had so much love and need in their eyes and kids who were gifted and precious in God's eyes. I not only desired for them to know God but I also wanted them to have a home and a future. I was touched by so many of them who would just come up to me on the street, hold my hand, braid my hair African style and talk to me.

There was another boy aged 16 named Olivier who was from an HIV infected family. Fortunately, he was the only one in the family who did not have AIDS. His mother was infected and so was his 9-year old sister. He shared with us his dream of wanting to start a barber shop and automatically, God reminded me of connecting him with another street kid on the soccer team who shared the same vision. God delighted in Olivier and his dreams and it gave me a heart to want to help him further his dream. God showed me that Jeremiah 29:11 was also a promise God had for Olivier.

"LAST TIME GOD TRANSFORMED MY PERSPECTIVE, THIS TIME HE ENLARGED AND DEEPENED IT"





God also allowed me to meet an ex-prostitute who had a son with an unknown father. She is now part of a group of women ministered and empowered by YWAM to make bags and baskets for sale in local markets. Both the mother and child were infected with HIV and she was the woman that I randomly approached to pray for when our team was asked to pray for someone in the room. All I could see when I was praying for her was a vision of a garden with lush grass and sunshine. I grabbed my interpreter to share with her that God had a future for her, that it would never go dry and will be like a lush garden that would always be watered and nourished. She smiled with delight and went on to share her need of seeing a doctor for her asthma. She had been waiting for several years to get treatment but could not afford it. I agreed to financially support her. In the end, when the ladies performed a Rwandan dance for us, I remembered her dancing with so much joy, so much gratitude and so much hope and I knew that Christ had touched her that day. It was a sight that brought me a lot of joy. I thanked God for showing me His love for this woman and her son.

On our last day in Rwanda, my husband and I were the first from our team to leave for Hong Kong. Our friend Serieux took us to the airport. Even before then, we were able to visit his home to have our goodbye chat. Serieux has been the leader of YWAM's youth ministry for many years and throughout this time has developed, encouraged and ministered to numerous teens and brought many young people to Christ. Through our conversation with him, God showed me his great and unwavering heart for kingdom work and his eternally plugged perspective. In the end, God reminded me that it was not about our abilities but rather our faith that we ought to offer to Him. Financially, Serieux did not have much but yet God provided him with the money to financially support street kids who were in physical need for food and shelter. In terms of business abilities, he had minimal but he desired his street kids to start their own. He really didn't have any of the worldly qualifications we often think we need in order to be worthy to do the Lord's work. In all the areas he lacked, God provided. What Serieux offered in great amounts was his amazing heart and a determined will to honor our Heavenly Father. It made me realize what I had been focusing on – my abilities and earthly concerns. These were my old clothes and I hope that the new clothes that God gave me through this trip will mean a heart to care about the things of God's heart.

As we waited in the Nairobi airport in Kenya for our connecting flight to Hong Kong, God spoke to me from Colossians 3 which echoed my experiences in Rwanda this year. "Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above not on earthly things....put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature....you used to walk in these ways...but now you must rid yourselves of all such things...since you have taken off your old self and have put on new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

Today, I am still reflecting on my new clothes but have come back from Rwanda freer and more vested in things that are eternal – my faith, relationships, His kingdom and His heart. And to think from the beginning before I left, what could God do in me in just 1 week?

“SET YOUR MINDS ON THINGS ABOVE NOT ON EARTHLY THINGS...”
COL 3:2



“I WANT YOU TO FEEL MY HEART BEAT”

He said to me in my spirit, "Look at this - the world that I hold in my heart. I want you to feel my heart beat and see my heart's desire. With or without you, My work still continues and My will shall be done. Yet I want you experience this and see first hand; I want you to continue to pray for this country and its people, not because you 'have to' but because you 'want to'. When you care about what I care about and then pray with a sincere heart, it will not pass my ear unheard."

The purpose of our team by being there is to encourage God's people and the many others we met that we do care enough to come and most importantly is that God does care. Jesus came for them. Rwanda is a place that is so filled with God's Spirit and you can see it in the people by their love and courage.

This is why I love Rwanda so much.



Touching on Home Ground From the Journal of Raymond Son

Wow the time has come for another opportunity to go on a Rwanda mission trip again! When I received the email announcement, I wondered to myself whether I should be going on a return trip. My conversation with God went something like this: "God, last year when I went to Rwanda, You changed me so much. So if I go again, what will you do this time? Im just going to go with no pre-conceived expectation ok and God you just use me."

Arriving in Kigali International Airport and stepping on that tarmac... it just felt like touching on home ground. Seeing my Rwandan friends again brought back all the memories. It flashed upon me - I was here to see family!

When I came for the first time last year, I really did not understand why one of our experienced team members, Florence, screamed with joy when she caught sight of all her African friends. "This girl is just plain crazy!" I thought to myself. Now I realise I was responding the same! It's as if we are like one huge family and how we have missed each other!

God graciously showed me a glimpse of the tremendous work he was doing in partnership with the family-of-Christ. They have been stepping out in faith as they work amongst the street kids, widows, HIV afflicted and prostitutes. Humbly asking God to help the people rebuild their lives under difficult conditions means trusting in a God who cares and believing that the God whom they serve is a powerful God of miracles. In their lives I saw the fruits of righteousness.





The Beatitudes From the journal of Rosalyn Woo

The world is changing.....

Major news this summer circled around drug problems, compensated dating, the phenomenon of young models that were embraced by young people; it's interesting to realize that drugs and sex are major temptations in the minds of people no matter where you are – in Hong Kong or in Rwanda – no matter the social status.

This year our theme is building the foundation on the solid rock. We demonstrated to the young people and young leaders two opposing lives – a life following Jesus' footsteps and a life following the flow of the world; most importantly, we emphasize to them that there is a choice.

People tend to blame things for decisions "they made". In Rwanda, it's easy to blame the entire social problem on the genocide. Sometimes, even I will doubt whether the situation can be improved at all, but Rwanda never fails to remind me once again that in God, nothing is impossible. Though the world may not be changing for the better, miracles have undoubtedly happened in the hearts of people as they choose to surrender their lives to God.

The prologue to the parable of the two builders is the Beatitudes. As I meditated on each of them, they reminded me of some people or things that happened during my trip, and the thoughts brought me hope as I was mourning over the sinfulness of our society.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Most of the missionaries we met are poor – physically poor. They live on faith and they look to God for providence. I was continually amazed by their cheerfulness in life and how they enjoyed their life in intimate and close dependence on God. And I heard testimony after testimony how God never failed them by providing what they needed in the right time and in the right portion. People in developed societies are materially rich, but are never satisfied. Riches brings them to pride and their dissatisfaction brings them to sin. News agencies report that some of the organizers of "compensated dating" were actually girls from wealthy families, they did it only to find excitement and "love".

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

We were all touched by the story of Jacqueline, a HIV positive woman we visited. She started her sharing with a description of her awful life: her ill-treatment by her family since she was young, her poor health which led to all kinds of physical suffering, and how she eventually contracted HIV from a man who cheated her love. She was hopeless and wanted to end her life. As we were all thinking in our minds words of encouragement for her, suddenly, her attitude changed completely. She recounted how she was born again when she accepted the Lord a few years ago and how she felt the love of God which brought her a life that is eternal and will not perish. She even used the story of Job to describe how she experienced the salvation and hope from the Lord in her suffering and how she wanted to use her experience to encourage all who are in similar situation as her! The whole team was shocked and in tears, we were touched because we saw with our own eyes the power of hope that comforts the broken hearted. People in our society refuse to face their own agony, instead choosing to bury their feelings with drugs and alcohol, but the Lord promises us that those who mourn in him and for him will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

A meek heart is a willing heart – just as Jesus willingly went up to the cross for us. I love Harvesters, a street kids ministry we visited because they are always lively and always joyful with songs of praise. Who can imagine that all these young people were once outrageous kids from the street, often choosing violence to end a problem! However, through the love of God, their lives are being changed into a group of loving and caring brothers and sisters who edify and serve each other. They willingly chose to let go of their old life to follow the step of Jesus. In the eyes of their old friends, they may be choosing a way of "cowardice", however, they have indeed received new significance and worth in their life; the truth has set them free from the bondage of this world!



“THE WORLD IS CHANGING...”

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

It is always hard to talk about "righteousness" in Rwanda – a land with a long history of killing and betrayal. Kids are born to be homeless, women are rejected because of disease, men are living in hatred and guilt. It is hard to find righteousness in this place. However, I saw a young street boy from the Soccer team testifying how he chose to live a new life pursuing his dream in the salon business; I saw how prostitutes and HIV patients found their dignity and acceptance in the love of Christ; I saw how brothers and sisters found reconciliation in the love and healing of God to be freed from hatred; I know that indeed Jesus IS their righteousness. Though the world is unrighteous, we may find justice, equality, acceptance, forgiveness and pure love in the life of Jesus. He satisfies our longing for righteousness in our lives.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

The homes of missionaries often house a few orphans. Usually the missionaries picks up these children from the street and in this new family, they are given a taste of human warmth and love. Most of the missionaries struggled with their own life financially. I also heard stories on how some of the children did not appreciate the action and ran away or did rebellious things. However, these challenges never hindered them from showing mercy to these children. I also heard stories of how some brothers spent countless days and night out in the field to get to know the streets kids, young prostitutes and child servants in order to build a relationship with them to be able to tell them the gospel and help them find an alternative way to make a living. These brothers and sisters can show mercy to the lost ones because they recognize the mercy they received while they were lost. How little love we have for those around us, how little love the world shows to the needy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

I enjoyed talking to many kids because they have the purest hearts. I remembered visiting an orphan home one day. After singing with them, we split into small groups to pray. When I asked the 12-year old girl for her prayer request, she mentioned that she would like us to pray for her studies. But it was not only for good grades but that she could rely on God in her studies and to be equipped with the knowledge to serve God and contribute to the society! She spoke all these from her heart, solely fixed on God, and God allowed her to see Him and the good things He has for her in her life. In one occasion, I asked Serieux whether he "missed" the glamorous life of Hong Kong and US after his visits. He said no without any hesitation. He said he saw the prosperity of the city but he also saw the emptiness in people's heart. I admire both of them, of their pure love and heart for God. Nothing can move their sight from God and therefore they are able to follow closely in His steps.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Rwanda has once lost its peace, however, the Lord has moved the hearts of a group of brothers and sisters to use movies to spread the message of love and forgiveness. Among them are those who have gone through the genocides and who once were enemies to each other. They were able to overcome the darkness in their hearts and minds to step out and proclaim the truth. It is so difficult to forgive those who harm your loved ones and it is even more difficult for a person to admit his own sin and forgive himself. But in God, all these are possible! God makes them peacemakers for the country and blesses their movies with rewards and opportunities to show to important people in their government and society. During one of the screening, the minister of defense actually came out from his seat and apologized in public for not putting this utmost effort to prevent the genocide! What a breakthrough in the path of reconciliation.

“RAIN POURED DOWN, THE RIVER FLOODED, A TORNADO HIT – BUT NOTHING MOVED THAT HOUSE. IT WAS FIXED TO THE ROCK”

MATT 7:24-28



HEAVEN IS IN OUR HEARTS IF WE WILLINGLY CHOOSE TO FOLLOW HIM

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

As the work of God is being carried out, I can sense that the enemy is also taking his offense. As the sons of God try to live a life not of this world, the enemy is using every way to discourage them. This year being my second year there, I spent more time talking with the people. I heard frustration and many difficulties in upholding the ministries and we saw hardened and cold hearts among long-time servants. There was a young brother who stumbled and strayed away; there was sister at the verge of giving up because she saw no fruit in her ministry for a long time; some struggled with funding for their ministry because their offerings were impacted by the economic downturn. We are at war with the devil but we were being reminded and encouraged one more time that a house that is built on a foundation of solid rock can withstand the strongest wind and storms. Seeing how the brothers and sisters in Rwanda persist and continue to fight the battle, I once again see how much God loves this country. God is going to use all His faithful servants to bring heaven to this earth, so that men can see Him.

Yes indeed the world is changing; it is getting dark. However, God's promises never changed. In poverty He brings richness in heart; in mourning He brings comfort and hope; in meekness He demonstrates the endurance and resilience of life; in unrighteousness He satisfies our hunger and thirst for justice and truth; in His mercy and sacrifice He demonstrates to us His salvation and love; in the pureness of heart He reveals Himself to mankind; in the turmoil of the world He brings peace and joy to human's heart; in the our battle with sin on this earth He brings us eternal reward in our pursuit of righteousness.

Heaven is in our hearts if we willingly choose to follow him. This is where change begins and it IS possible in God. Rwanda once again testified all of this.



Indescribable From the journal of Zita Hung

Indescribable, uncontainable
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.
You are amazing God

It began a year ago when I met them
Returnees with amazing testimonies
Two trees in a field, pray. Missing keys, pray
Everything it seemed – pray!

Two Rwandan brothers from conflicting tribes
I heard your stories and I could see
See how Jesus' blood covered a red and grieving land
Forgiveness and reconciliation by His love

I had no plan to go to Africa
How crazy life gets when you take a chance
To seek, to love, to give, to share
And God shows up to meet your needs and fears

To step onto scorched auburn soil and pray
With an African doctor and a Canadian one
Am I experiencing a forgotten prayer Lord?
You are amazing God

Break her heart for what breaks Yours

They prayed for what they saw
My tender heart encased in scars of war
In the midst of torrential tears I saw
Your heart to redeem and restore

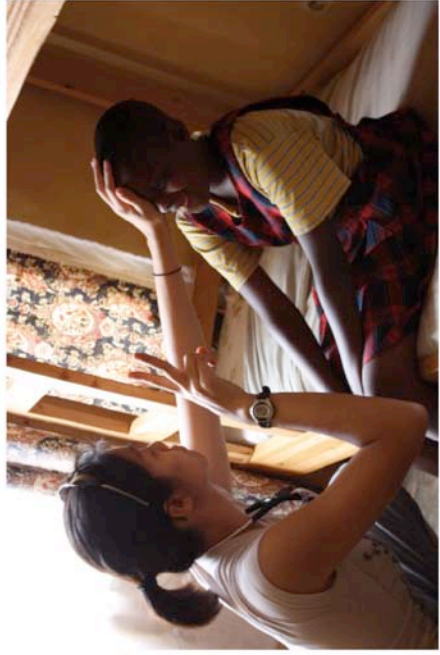
I thought my faith was enough
But, You showed me it didn't measure up
And when I prayed for it to grow
God, you answered that prayer I know

Some things simply cannot be rationalized
Faith in your character is what you ask
Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray
Silly humans, I'm going to bless them like no other You say

Little did I know how soon and stealthily
Those blessings would rain down on me
How else do I explain
The transformations that have taken place

I have discarded my old clothes
And put on new robes of identity
I pray for my patients because I believe
God is sovereign and cares for their eternity





My application form - Before the trip

I have never gone on an outreach or missions trip. The closest I have come to "serving" is working at a surgical centre for the poor in Phnom Penh and at that time, I felt the sharp divide between science and faith. Things were scientifically interesting. But faith and salvation were never a part of the patient-doctor or doctor-colleague relationship. To me, these two disciplines don't mix. The closest I have come to mixing medicine and faith is murmuring a short prayer under my breath for my patients. I feel doubly incompetent about saving souls as I am about saving lives. To most people, medicine is a bright-eyed angelic discipline that is full of hope, miracles, and competence. But to me, medicine is a haggard teenager, sick of rattling breath sounds and sick of the prolongation and empty arsenal against suffering. But I continue to do it because it is the only skill I have

and because I have to believe that I am a doctor for a better reason or meaning than the fact that I need to make a living. So I'm waiting for the Lord to show up and use me.

I would like to see God at work in helping me integrate my personality, profession, and spiritual belief. I am not involved in any ministries but I know my ministry should have something to do with children.

The simplest of lives – Rwanda

*From ashes to beauty
Mourning to dancing
Anguish to songs of praise*

Out of the ashes rose the Rwanda before our eyes. I can now testify of how God can turn ashes into beauty. I met the simplest and yet the most moving Christians in my life. Their simple faith struck me. These people don't question why there is suffering in this world. They just know suffering is the enemy because they have gone through it. Instead, they have found the Answer to help them move past the suffering. Did they question God when the killings started? Of course! Do they blame God for the genocide? Not the people I met. They are the hands and feet doing Christ's work on this earth, in their country.

"Do you believe in medical miracles?" I asked Sylvan as we rode to the genocide museum. All I knew was that he worked with AIDS widows and that he was a YWAM staff member.

"Yes, I have seen medical miracles."

"But why does God heal some people and not others?" "Sometimes God is so difficult to understand!" I protested.

"I don't know. I just know that all things are possible through God." "I don't think about so many things, I am just a simple Christian," he smiled.

And that is what many of us came to admire and learn from our Rwandan brothers and sisters. That simple faith can be the strongest force. But I also saw that friends whom I admired for being strong had moments of weakness and self doubt, and that is just normal.

Being able to absorb the worship and wisdom of mature Christians by being on the YWAM base was a blessing. I was aware, however, that I was only experiencing one very small slice of the general Rwandan population. But I can also recount the bewilderment I felt in a remote village called Gahanga where we went to make mud bricks and build a cow shed for a widow. As we ate our lunches in our taxi-van, we started to observe a group of tattered children singing and dancing on the sandy roadside. They were wearing soiled clothes, had grime and dirt all over themselves and yet, they were like children everywhere. Just being, just dancing, just playing. They were laughing and joyful even though I could tell they were malnourished from their large bellies. We couldn't understand what they were singing and then we heard in their song: ...Yesu....Yesu....

God, you must be kidding me? You're here in some remote mountain village? The people here don't speak a word of English. Where did they learn these songs? Of course, Rwanda had been a Catholic country for a long time. But I couldn't deny God's presence at that moment. It was like He was saying – dirt, grime, sweat, mud, dung can all be washed away but the work of Christ is a fragrance that permeates every place and cannot be washed away.

As our new Rwandan friend Bernard said, "Spreading the Christian faith is not about saving lives and then saying to the people – See you in heaven, but in the meantime, your life will suck." Rather, we need to give people hope and meaning on this earth, at this time. That is why you go.

He answers prayers

Today, I revisited my application form almost two months after I first wrote it. It's amazing for me to see how God has given me what I have sought. I am now praying for my patients everyday. Because I believe, it makes a difference. Even though it might have been obvious, I have found my ministry. You are a doctor, isn't it quite obvious your ministry is in healing? Uh, no, it really wasn't that obvious to me. And finally, he even challenged me with a new job and the courage to accept it.

So, acknowledge Him in all your ways, and He shall direct your paths.

A Dialogue with God From the journal of Mercedes Chan

The other day one of my friends asked me, "Do you ever hear God speak to you?"

I replied, "Yes, of course. All the time."

As I walked away from that conversation, I thought to myself, "Yes, God does speak to us all the time – but why is it harder to hear Him sometimes than others?" I reflected on our selective human hearing and the distractions of the world that often keep us from hearing the voice of God. But regardless of the reasons that deafen us, I know that when God called me to Rwanda this summer that He had an agenda, and He spoke to me, loud and clear:

1) "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." – Matthew 28:19

God opened my heart and mind to embracing and working with the African people, and as an extension, further establishing and encouraging spiritual, personal and working relationships with people of all cultures.

Until recently, Africa, had, for me, held the reputation of being exactly how it has been described in history books: "The Dark Continent". Dark for me in that I knew almost nothing about it, and even less about the people who live there. Growing up in Vancouver and Hong Kong, I was more familiar with Asian cultures and until this year, had focused my missionary work in China. I knew that I wanted to enlarge the scope of my spiritual and professional travels, though, and so, with an initially hesitant – but convicted – heart, I went to Rwanda.

I was humbled by how little of the world I knew outside of Canada and Hong Kong when I arrived in Africa. Despite considering myself well travelled, there is something to be said of being a tourist and being in relationship with locals of a country outside one's own. Though often portrayed as a part of the world overwhelmed by poverty, famine and medical crises, one aspect of Africa that is often overlooked is the joy that is inherent to its people. My heart was so encouraged by the strength and the resilience of the African people, by their spirit, their hope and their simple, open faith.

2) "He will heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds." – Psalm 147:3

The path to racial reconciliation and forgiveness is a slow but present process in Rwanda. During my time in Rwanda, I had the privilege of spending time in the Kigali Genocide Memorial Center, an institution dedicated to remembering and educating the public about genocide. There was a story of a 12-year-old boy whose last memory was of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (the group who would help end the genocide) staging an intervention. I remember reading about his life and my heart broke as my eyes glanced over his dream: to become a doctor. We had the same dream at a similar time in our lives – mine had become a reality while his had been taken away.

"DO YOU EVER HEAR GOD SPEAK TO YOU?"

I remember walking through the memorial center with Sylvan, one of the YWAM (Youth With a Mission) staff we had had the privilege of working with. He, himself, had felt the effects of the Tutsi-Hutu divide, fleeing to Uganda before the genocide. In the garden of the memorial center, we prayed for Rwanda and for the healing that is taking place in a country with a past filled with violence and bloodshed and its consequences: widows, orphans, homelessness, street kids, HIV/AIDS and psychological trauma.

I was encouraged by the steps that are being taken to help the Rwandese move forward from the effects of the genocide: counseling services, orphanages, employment strategies, schools for street kids and HIV/AIDS and prostitute ministries among others. Refugees who fled to neighboring countries are returning to their homeland. Reconciliation between ethnic groups through open discussion and educational programs regarding past injustices and the beginning of mixed marriages between Hutus and Tutsis are breaking cultural divides. The number of Rwandese investing in their country, its history, its future and its youth was also staggering and inspiring to see. From filmmakers to musicians to dance teachers, it was obvious that there are individuals who are passionate about working towards what will undoubtedly be a very bright future for Rwanda.





3) **"And they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments..." "I counsel you to buy from Me...white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.." – Revelations 3:4-5, 18**

During my time in Rwanda, one of our team members brought up these verses from Revelations as he was leaving some of his clothes behind as a donation. Throughout our trip, we were also encouraged to leave behind our "old clothes" and to put on "new clothes" – to leave behind a part of our old selves and to emerge as a "newer" version of ourselves.

My trip to Rwanda was an intensely personal experience. I am 27 years old and a doctor. I have felt called to the medical profession since I was 5 years old and when I was 16, I felt called to serve in China. And so, from the time I was 17 and entered medical school, I have done these two things. I went to Africa because I wanted to break away from a mould I felt would be my life. I also wanted to be involved in a trip where I did not have to be a doctor, in a place where I had no previous or personal affiliations. I wanted to see how else and where else I could be used. In a way I was running away from all previous constraints I felt God (or perhaps, I, myself, or others) had placed on my life. And I am thankful because by going to Rwanda, God freed me from myself.

Since coming back from Africa, I have learned that it is not where you serve, but whom you serve and how. I have learned that God has blessed each individual with different skill sets and gifts so that they may use these talents to glorify Him – and that we should not be ashamed of them, or to disregard them as ways by which to serve, but to use them joyfully. Going to Rwanda asserted me of the medical skills God has blessed me with and allowed me to embrace them. It reaffirmed the heart God gave me for missions and revealed to me that I may be called to serve in more than one part of the world. In realizing these "truths", I was able to cast off my "old clothes" and live more freely in my new ones.

God brought me to Rwanda at a time in my life where I had many questions and anxieties about my future. He also brought me to Africa at a time I was in need of spiritual rejuvenation, community, and a better glimpse of the expanses of His kingdom and His people, disciples of all the nations. For a while, I have known that there were things He wanted to show me, but in the distractions of life, I could not hear Him, or perhaps I was scared to. God brought me to a place where He cast off all fear from me and had me depend on Him completely, and in that place, He spoke to me because He knew I would be listening. And as usual, His timing was perfect.

**"FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU," DECLARES THE LORD,
 "PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE
 YOU A HOPE AND A FUTURE
 JER 29:11**

**TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND LEAN NOT ON
 YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING; IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE
 HIM AND HE WILL MAKE YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT.**

PROV 3:5-6

In Love with Rwanda From the journal of Helen Cheung



"RWANDA IS A PLACE OF EXTREMES. GOING THERE IS LIKE GOING TO HELL AND HEAVEN AT THE SAME TIME"

Darkness and Light

Humanity is dark, and in Rwanda, this darkness manifested itself right in your face to the extreme with the genocide in 1994. Yet in this pitch darkness, the stars in the sky shine all the more brighter.

This is the third year of my two-week visits to Rwanda. Every year, we go back to hear more and more stories of what God is doing there to heal and reconcile the people. We walk with the people there in their journey of forgiveness, healing and new life. It is amazing. God loves the Rwandan people. In a land of brokenness and fear, He is pouring out His mercy and love.

Often in my life in Hong Kong, I'd forget about my extended Rwandan family. Yet every time I go back to Rwanda, I'd be amazed again and remember why I have fallen in love with this country – how can I miss out on going back to see what God is doing there?

Short-Term and Long-Term Mission

And my trip this year deepened my understanding of the role of short-term missionaries. It might seem like there's not much we could do there for 2 two weeks each time. But when we go back for two weeks year after year, a short-term mission turns long-term. Every year, we go back to catch up on how God has led the Rwandans for the year and how they've changed.

And with what we see, hear and know of the work being done there, we can come back to Hong Kong and still be part of this work – by prayers. Prayers is the most important form of ministry. No man can accomplish anything for God on his own. Only God has the power to make things happen. Are the lives of those hearing the gospel in the hands of the missionaries? No. Their lives are in the hands of God. And we can pray to God directly for their lives. We share the burden of rescuing their lives in our prayers for them. It is not just a short-term mission, but a long-term mission of prayers.

Poverty and Riches

And in Rwanda, we meet amazing people of God. Last year, our team bought goats and gave one to each widow in the neighbourhood of Gahanga. One of the widows sold her goat and used the money to start a business of selling beans in the local market. With this business, she earns a profit of US\$20 per month, which is just enough to feed herself and her grandchild. It makes me ponder about the injustice in our human world. Yet what is even more mind-blowing is that despite living below the poverty line, this lady's life just exudes with such amazing joy, grace and gratitude. It is beautiful.

And from families like these, we meet people who gave up everything to be full-time Christian ministers at YWAM (Youth With A Mission – the missionary organisation we stayed with). It is simply radical. Every time I see these people and hear about their lives, I am humbled and in awe. And my mission teammate posed us with a thought-provoking question – yes these people live radical lives. Yet what makes them radical? Isn't it God who changes them so? And aren't our God the same God? So what's stopping us from living radical lives for God in Hong Kong?

In Love with God

Our world is a place of extremes. And our God is the God of all – heaven, earth and hell. Thank God that Rwanda is a place where I experience Him more and fall deeper in love with Him.

Why From the journal of Helen Cheung

Back from the Genocide Memorial again, stooped in the power of hell again.

Lord, how do You see this world of Yours?

This fallen world of human kind?

If You don't let Your goodness remain with us, we will live in a world of hell.

If You don't intervene,

we will devour each other and Your land.

If You don't save us,

we will all be dead men walking this earth.

Why would You love us, Lord?

Why would You love us?

Lord, in sin we're all consumed, and genocides are merely manifestations of it.

Thank You that though we deserve hell,

You still cause the sun to shine upon us all.

Thank You that though we are trying blinding to play gods,

You reveal Yourself as the one true and good living God.

Thank You that though we were dead and lost,

You've conquered the graves in us and resurrected Yourself in our hearts.

Why do You love us so, Lord?

Why do You love us so?

Lord, Rwanda is a place of such extremes.

Open our eyes to see You in the utmost here.

We praise You that as we go more into darkness,

we can see more of Your stars shining bright.

We praise You that as we walk through the valleys of death,

we can run to You, our giver of Life.

We praise You that as we lose all hope in ourselves,

we can trust You, our only solid Rock.

Why do You love us so much, Lord?

Why do You love us so much?

May we dwell in Your house all the days of our lives, and be consumed with Your beauty alone our Lord.

Thoughts From the journal of David Kersten

I can't really think of what to say, as I have put off writing anything down for a while now. First off, I would like to say that the trip was a very powerful experience, spiritually and emotionally.

As I mentioned on the trip, I have never been on a trip anything like this one. Going all the way to Rwanda and listening to people share testimonies, both Rwandese and people in our group, more and more had me realizing that I don't need to go all the way to Rwanda to share God's love. In fact, I know God's love was shared with me by the people of Rwanda more than I could ever have shown to them. Meeting all these new people brought me ever closer to home, seeing the commitment and enthusiasm that YWAM volunteers had to the people, the community, and the re-forming of a nation of God in Rwanda, let me realize just how much the same is needed in any community I have ever been in. I know people living in the same apartment as me that need God's love in their lives.

I know that isn't really a complete thought, but I am still piecing things together in my mind, as I have not taken much time to just think since I have been back. Mike and I shared at our church two weeks ago, and last week the Bible class was about humility. The people I met in Rwanda were all that came to my mind. Noel showing us his film and asking for critique? That literally would have killed me if I was in his position, as I get unnecessarily proud of things I work at and shrug off most ideas for them. Also, obviously, Sylvan also came to mind as another example of humility, with his simple prayer for God to give him more work to do. I is hard for me to imagine being anywhere near that humble. So more than anything, the trip showed me how much of sinner I am, not only for the things that I do, but maybe even more so for the things that I do not do, but could.

Thank you so much for the opportunity and acceptance on the Rwanda trip!

**“I HAVE NEVER BEEN ON A TRIP
ANYTHING LIKE THIS.”**

In Love with Rwanda From the journal of Alexandra Ip

Rwanda has a special place in my heart. This is my second time I went to Rwanda and my first visit was 4 years ago. I still remember that Rwanda was so backward back in 2005. There was no tap water, no electricity at night, no café and the road in Kigali (capital of Rwanda) was bumpy and dusty.

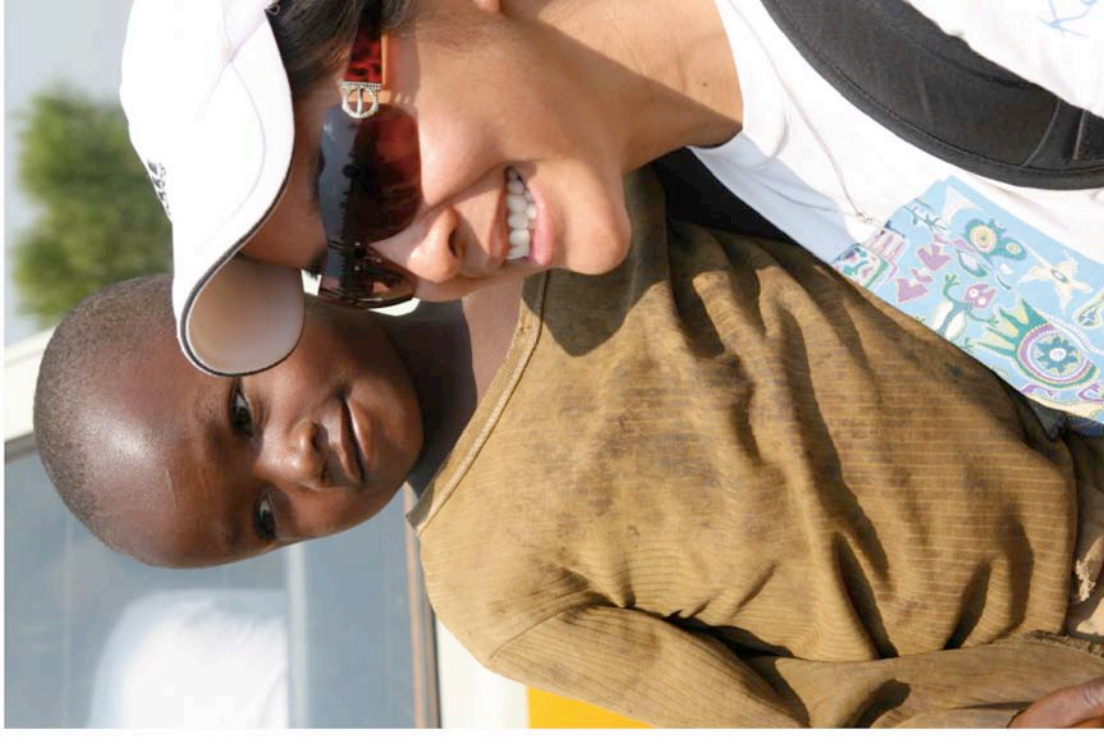
As God promised, he has rebuilt this country and there is so much prosperity everywhere in Rwanda. “Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.” Ezekiel 36:36. You will be so touched and amazed to see so many beautiful houses on the hill which are bought by the investors from abroad. In the YWAM base, now they have all the basic facilities including solar panels. The roads in Kigali are well paved. At night, the sky is filled with twinkling little stars, and the lights are all lit up on the hill. What a peaceful and beautiful picture painted by God.

Prior to our mission trip to Rwanda, God gave me Psalm 65 to show me what he has done to Rwanda in the past 4 years and how we should respond to his great deeds.

- 1 Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled.
- 2 O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come.
- 3 When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.
- 4 Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.
- 5 You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas,
- 6 who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, 7 who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.
- 8 Those living far away fear your wonders; where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy.
- 9 You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.
- 10 You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
- 11 You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.
- 12 The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness.
- 13 The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.

Yes, there was so much transgression in Rwanda, yet God forgave them. Our mighty God “stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves and the turmoil of the nation”. Now, there is so much more peace and reconciliation between the ethnic groups. It is only God who can have the power to quiet the turmoil, bring healing and hope to the despaired soul, prosper the land with his overflowing love and provision.

One day, we went to visit the widows in a remote village where we have supported the ladies to rent the land for farming. When I was standing in front of the green fields of cabbage, tomatoes, corns; seeing the fruits of their hard labors, I was deeply touched. Not only did I admire the widow's strength and perseverance, but also I was meditating on God's grace falling unto this nation. God blesses their crops, crowns the widows with love and compassion. It is awesome just to meditate on his greatness and grace to the Rwandans.



**“...I THE LORD HAVE REBUILT WHAT WAS
DESTROYED...” EZE 36:36**

When God provides, he wants us to use that abundant blessing to bear fruit for him. He wants us to remember his great and righteous deeds, and we should always shout for joy and sing. My heart for this nation is the people will grow their love and faith more deeply for God. Do not forget his unending love, praise and worship continually as his vows with Rwanda have been fulfilled one after another.

While I was seeing the beautiful crops in the field, I was also witnessing how God has grown our Rwandan brothers and sisters so much in the past 4 years. Some of them were youth from Harvesters, now they became film director, producer, actors and script writer. One of them were DTS (Discipleship training school) student and became the Headmaster of the Rise and Shine school at YWAM base. In our eyes, these people are orphans, child soldier, criminals, street kids, nameless wanderers, soul-less prostitutes, hopeless widows but in God eyes, they are his beloved, honored children who glorify his name, multiply his kingdom and walk in the truth.

Only God has this Transformational Power! They PRAY BIG, have BIG FAITH and VISIONS come true in a BIG way.

It is awesome to see how God has worked in their hearts and nurtured all these faithful servants under his wings. You see Jesus in each of our Rwandan brothers and sisters, they live for God and they are ON FIRE. We are living comfortably in the city of HK, we do not need miracles in our lives because of our abundance, our abilities to control, our indifference and our complacency. In Rwanda, God showed me miracles. He asked me to take a step of faith, to trust him and to bless others through prayers. To wait on him, to pray and to act on it!

God is teaching me that darkness is part of our reality, yet I have the Confidence and Faith in my father that he will bring light into darkness and prosper those who are blameless and upright, fear God and shun evil. " He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into the light." Job 12-22 With God, nothing is impossible. Put our Hope in him and Rejoice!



God Alive in Us From the journal of Mike Kersten

When I was in Rwanda, I met amazing people of God. In hearts where Jesus has worked reconciliation and new life in the wake of genocide, I encountered a passion and purity of faith that is unmatched by anyone who I have met previously in my life.

I was often reminded of the words of Jesus recorded by Luke about the woman who anointed Christ's feet. "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much." It is an understatement to say that there are many sins in a nation that witnessed her population raped and slaughtered, by hand, at the murder rate of five people per minute for 100 days in the late spring of 1994. Every surviving Rwandan is related to either a victim or a killer. Fifteen years later, relationships between family, friends, and neighbors maintain deep fractures. There is indeed much to reconcile.

But the reconciliation is happening. And those who have received it in Rwanda are loving much. Men and women of faith are testifying to the power of Christ and the personal stories of those for whom grace has initiated new life are humbling and inspiring. During the trip, I kept having the sense that Jesus died in Rwanda in 1994 but, as happened once before in 1st century Palestine, Christ's body is being resurrected in the Church.

It's the sight that I've been longing for.



I had been working in Taiwan as a missionary for three and half years when my doubts finally grew into unbelief and I quit the mission field in 2007. Certainly, my "death" in Taiwan pales in comparison to either Jesus' crucifixion or the Rwandan genocide. That said, leaving Taiwan in the manner which I did was for me an excruciating moment when I cried "My God, why have you forsaken me!" and damaged my relationships with family, friends, and neighbors with fractures that remain to this day.

While I was in Rwanda, each successive testimony, song, prayer, dance, and story of new life drew my thoughts inexorably to my dying days in Taiwan. Names and faces swirled before my eyes. Students, teachers, coworkers, brothers and sisters in Christ... those who I disappointed, failed, or betrayed. The question applies to all tragedies, big and small. How could this have happened?

Among the many inspiring men who I met in Rwanda was Serieux Kanamugire. In fact, I first met him six months ago in Hong Kong, when my coworker Praise Ma introduced him to share for my Humanities class, after which I became interested in joining this trip. Serieux works with 16 to 25 year old "street kids" in the capital city of Kigali, many of whom are orphans and the head of household for their siblings (despite having no home). Through soccer outreach, Serieux has gathered these young men together and shared Christ with them, imbuing them with hope and a future.

Confronted with these stories, I am ashamed at how easy my life has been. And at how easily I wanted to walk away from Christianity because of doctrinal disillusionment and historical criticism. On a dusty soccer field in Kimisagara, and indeed in each Rwandan home and village that we visited, every philosophical noose that I'd been hanging myself upon seemed completely irrelevant in the face of such compassion, such brokenness, such love.

God knows how many sleepless nights I passed in Taiwan, begging to see God's existence and receiving in response only His deafening silence. Two and a half years later, standing in a land once blighted by broken relationships and death, in a land where so many are begging so fervently for Christ to heal, I finally saw Him. He is in Serieux, and Noel and Sylvan and the members of the Island Church team, and others.

God is alive in us.

Words fail to do justice to the profundity of this affirmation and how convincingly the experience in Rwanda brings it home. God is alive in us. That's it. Like the woman in Luke's gospel, I can simply fall speechless at Christ's feet and pour out my tears.

Last weekend, I went back to Taiwan and visited a few of the people who I left so suddenly in 2007. I stayed with my former friends and coworkers and their oldest child, my goddaughter. I met the family who had always come to my Bible study classes at the church. I went back to worship with the congregation that I dismissed and abandoned. We prayed together. The seeds of reconciliation begin to sprout peace.

I thank God for the opportunity to join the Rwanda trip this year and I pray now as well. I pray that this reconciliation could continue to grow, step by step, replacing death with life. I've seen it happening now, starting, in Rwanda and in my life. And I am praying to God again, with hope, that He who began this good work will carry it onto completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Amen.

"I FINALLY SAW HIM"



Dreams From the journal of Melanie Ho

How do you put yourself in ones shoes when they've not got the money to buy any? Entering into Rwanda was entering into suffering. Dipping just a finger into someone's ocean of despair. The contrast between what you have ever lived or experienced and what they walk in daily is immeasurable. The pain they carry on their shoulders, the sickness that invades their body, the loss that sits in their memory. Yet still what struck me most in Rwanda was the hope in each person's heart.

We plodded into the cracked and dusty home of a widow one morning to hear her story. Just by sharing, she surrendered her situation to God, as something not to be ashamed of; she dismissed it as life, a trial that would soon pass. To this woman beans are everything. What we pick out of our salad or eat on occasion with breakfast sausages and slightly enjoy, are to her, a child's education; a meal; healthcare; an income; they're gold. As she explained, tears filled her glassy eyes and in the creases of her skin I saw loss, heartbreak, pain, accomplishment, confidence, bravery, faith; a beautiful woman. Refusing to beg, she collected beans from local farmers for a sum of money and sold them for a profit.

Accomplishment can be simple.

After calculating, we learned that her profit was USD10.

Accomplishment can be small.

Though she is known for them, though they are physically what seem to be providing her needs, her beans do not define her. Her faith in God to provide does.

On my 2nd night in Rwanda, a man asked what my dream was. I named a few interests, said I had a few "possible career directions", threw in a hobby, and starting in "um", ending in "I guess" that was my routine response to what I thought was a question I had commonly been asked. Although I'd only ever heard "what are you thinking of doing?" or "so what are your plans?"

From the puzzled look I got, I understood he had asked something entirely different.

All I could say "well, what's yours?"

In the world we live in, people are afraid to dream. We're afraid to let ourselves down, let others down, to be mocked. We fear embarrassment, shame, disappointment. What if it doesn't work out? It's too much for us, it's too risky.

The people I met in Rwanda knew they were incapable of anything alone. Their circumstances make it evident. But every individual I met in Rwanda had a dream. I've learned that you can't always be sure that God will make something happen. But you must be sure that he can. If it's not in his will, if it doesn't work out, chances are God has something just as cool in store, perfectly suited for you. Chances are God's dream for you is much bigger than yours.

"GOD'S DREAM FOR YOU IS MUCH BIGGER THAN YOURS"



Changed by His love From the journal of Florence Chiu

I saw what I saw and I can't forget it
I heard what I heard and I can't go back
I know what I know and I can't deny it

Your pain has changed me
your dream inspires
your face a memory
your hope a fire
your courage asks me what I'm afraid of
and what I know of love

Something on the road, touched my very soul
Something on the road, changed my world
I will never be the same again

"SOMETHING ON THE ROAD, CHANGED MY WORLD"

It seems like the longer I am back in HK, the more I realise how much Rwanda has changed me. When your soul and heart has been plunged into the depths, when one realises something deep inside has changed and will never return to where it was before, you can only move forward with that change inside, forever walking with it.

When the people there become your family, when arrival feels like a homecoming, when you catch a glimpse of the world through His eyes, when you watch a street kid grow up, when you cannot deny the presence of God in the lives of those you meet...one cannot NOT change. Through the people in Rwanda, love, reconciliation, forgiveness, sin, grace, justice, righteousness have all been redefined and re-learned.

Father, take me deeper was my prayer as I went through the weeks. How much can I care and love? Enlarge my heart was my cry. The Father's broken heart broke my own as I came face to face with the depths of human sin. But this is the same place where God showed me what it means for Him to redeem and heal what is broken. In the darkest places, the depth of His love and grace is only magnified. Not just because we see it in others, but because God uses those same people to heal our own brokenness. It is impossible to walk away once you are deep into the lives of those we now call family. It is impossible not to care.

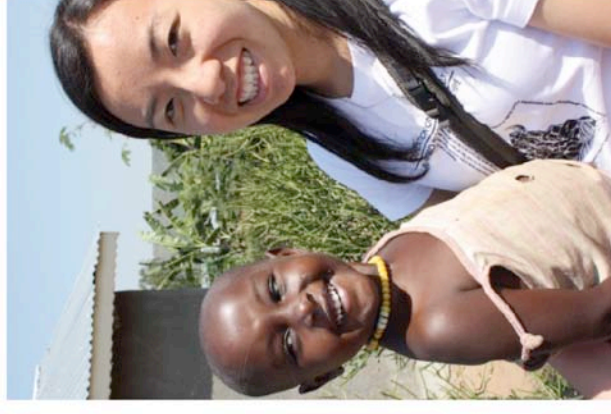
In Rwanda, life is so real. So raw. A child's desire to go to school. A prayer for food on the table. A kid who used to tie himself to a tree for a bed. A woman selling her body for men to feed her hungry baby with an unknown father. A teen who hears a song in his head whenever he is faced with temptation 'Jesus loves me this I know'. A street kid's dream to start an orphan home for 'boys like him'. A young boy wearing the same shirt I saw him in one year ago. The shirt is more faded. He's grown taller but he remembers me. Story after story of 'life'. Life that is far from perfect. Ones that are faced with the simplest questions - food, shelter, clothes. A life with God. A life without God. Like threads on a carpet, each one weaves together into a beautiful collage of God's character. There are too many stories to tell - about each encounter, each moment with my brothers and sisters, their love, hope and pain, about God, about what God has taught me. I do not even know where to begin. Back in Hong Kong, life seems very surreal.

It is difficult not to think of Rwanda in Hong Kong. But Rwanda is no longer a place I just go to visit every summer. It has become a part of who I am. Their lives have become a part of mine. Our journeys have not only crossed but we now walk together, through the heights and through the valleys. The stories of each person I have come to love deeply are etched in my heart. It is perhaps hard to imagine how we can become so close to people who may not ever understand a fraction of what life in Hong Kong is like. Perhaps love is that simple when connection is made at the heart in Christ.

Keep us from just singing. Move us into action. You have shown us what you require. To act justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly before you God. To free the oppressed. To plead the case of the widows. To feed the hungry. Stand beside the broken.

In Rwanda I am brought closer to God's heart. Not only His heart for Rwanda. But His heart for me, Hong Kong and this world. How deep, how wide is His love for us. Show us how to love like You.

Father take me deeper still that I may know you more. Take me to the place where you want me to go. Take me and send me. Take all of my heart and my body. Take my fears and doubts. Take everything of who I am and make it Yours. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of their lives, lives that point me to You. Please continue to change me with Your love.





FROM THE EYES
OF JON LAU
& ROSS LI



The Village by the Rocks

"The Wise Men Built His House on the a Rock." – Matthew 7:24

We were finally in Bukora village, a small collection of mud and concrete dwellings with tin roofs. I quickly followed Teacher David along the path towards the school. Just as we got to the small rented house that was holding the small preschool-aged kids, I looked directly across from the school. My mouth dropped as I saw the craggy outcrop of rocks growing out of a grassy clearing. It looked just like the image depicted on our team T-shirt, a representation of our theme this year from Matthew 7 of the wise man building a house on the foundation of a rock. To the Rwandese people of all ages, this year we were to bring the message of building on a fixed foundation and not on the shifting sand. I have been praying for this place since I heard about this village of Rwanda near the border of Tanzania and how these people are returning refugees from Tanzania who fled the Genocide and the conflicts that started a few generations before. Leaving their possessions behind, they had to start life again with minimal provision and assistance. Since I heard about the villagers who live in this rocky area, I prayed for them. For the kids to have a chance to go to school, for the adults to have a way to make a living, for them to know God's love. In my mind I saw kids running around on a big rock face and lots of village homes surrounding a group of rocks. I knew God was saying we needed to go to them and pray for them. So as I stood before the rocky formation, quite unique to this area, I was in awe that God brought me to the people of the village by the rocks that has grown in my heart.

It was an answered prayer to see the precious kids crowded in the small rooms of the "school", the labor of love of Teacher David and Celestin. Nearby in a borrowed church building, the adults were learning basic English and learning ideas on how to have a livelihood. Yet there is so much against them, they are the forgotten people. A mountain of rocks surrounds them, yet it is possible to climb to the top. With a steady foothold and strength, we climbed to the top of a big rock face. Looking down on the valley and beyond, we could see Tanzania the land these villagers had to leave. The villagers of Bukora are climbing their mountains now hoping to get to the top. As we walked through the dusty dirt paths, I knew the next generation of villagers would feel a sense of belonging, enough to build a solid future in this sun-scorched land. May they know God as the unchanging solid rock foundation of their lives.



“MAY THEY KNOW GOD AS THE UNCHANGING SOLID ROCK FOUNDATION OF THEIR LIVES”



Storms and Thorns

"The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock." – Matthew 7:25

The more I soak deeper into the ground of Rwanda, I sense more and more the storms that come to knock people off their feet and to stop standing on the solid foundation are getting stronger. The storm of poverty is overwhelming. When people don't have food to eat and no way to make an income, what can they do? The forces of this fallen world are so strong. Youth get caught up in stealing, taking and selling drugs, working in unhealthy situations, and other ways to get money. Money becomes the center of who they are, their identity and their future. When single moms have no more food to feed their hungry children, they sell vegetables on the roadside hoping men would sleep with them and give them some cash. They don't want to do it but they have no choice because there is no other way they know to be able to survive. They are vulnerable to destruction. How can they build a strong house when as they are building, the wind and rain want to knock them off?

We pray that against this type of rocky soil, people can survive and be able to establish deep and healthy roots to be able to grow. Like in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, we see the seeds of God's love and knowledge being scattered all around to many Rwandese people. Though many are falling into shallow soil and are scorched in the sun because there is no root. Other seeds are among thorns that are choking the plants that are growing. The thorns of poverty and judgment are so tenacious and have a great hold on many lives.



God please have mercy on these people. On the widows who are illiterate and who do physical labor to feed themselves and their family. On the young moms who sleep with men to get the money they need to feed their children. On the streetkids who don't have an opportunity to go to school but are working in the markets or doing harmful things to give themselves a chance at life. On those who have HIV/AIDS that their physical weakness will not hinder their inner worth. Take away their thorns so that they may grow into strong people and know you.

As we prepared the ground beside the widow's dilapidated home to make mud bricks, we needed to get rid of the rocks and thorns. Using a hoe, I began removing the rocks away. Many were heavy and it was hard to get rid of all of them. The hoe couldn't get to the bottom of the roots of the weeds and thorns, so I had to use my hands and all my strength to pull them out.

My hands did hurt, but the soil was softer and we got ready to make the bricks we needed to rebuild the walls of the widow's home. For those that have been shown God's love, for those that have understood His grace, will it be able to take root in their lives to profoundly guide how they live and their decisions? When faced with difficult situations, will they be easily steered to go off the path? We pray they will have tenacity to overcome their harsh environment to be lead fruitful lives that reflect God's goodness.

Deepening Roots

"Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." – Matthew 13:8

Having been to Rwanda for 6 years, I have seen the planting, growing and now some fruits of God's work. There are many widows who now have small businesses started off with money they gained from raising goats we gave them in the previous years. There are widows and prostitutes who are honing their machine sewing skills to make bags and other handicrafts which they can sell. Also, down in the valley of Gahanga village we walked under the shade of banana trees to see the vegetable patches, like the dotted lush green rows of cabbages growing under the hot rays of the sun. I remember the woman with AIDS, who shared her life with us through a raspy voice and a coarse cough coming from pneumonia or tuberculosis. Though illiterate she could recount to us scripture from the Bible and encouraged herself with Job. She has a burden to encourage others with AIDS also to live through death. Then there is Almond Tree Films Rwanda, formed with some youth that are using their video production training from director Isaac Chung and now making a living and a name for themselves, producing some of the top music videos in the country! Also, the streetkids in the football ministry that I prayed for all these years against temptation in their lives and a way to break out of their environment, they told us that they were saving money together to start a hair salon. It is beautiful to see lives be allowed to grow, to watch people change. They are deep in my heart, too many to mention. Too many stories. I've had a privilege to see this hope coming from despair.

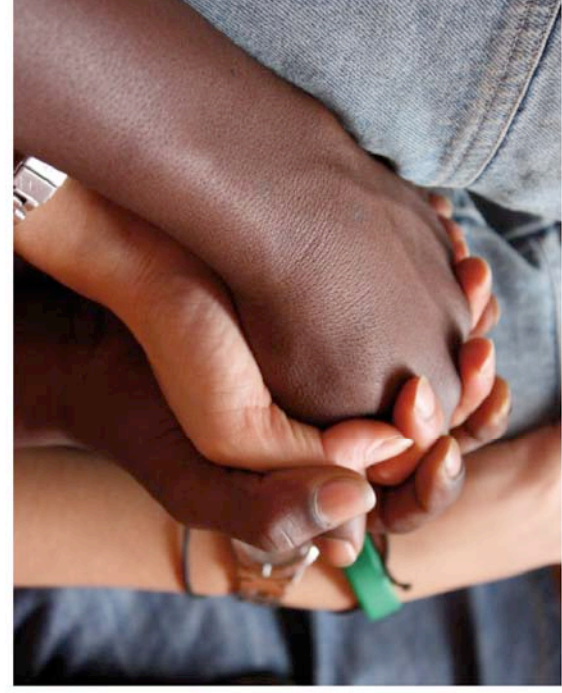
Just as we see some fruits of investing in people's lives, we see the enemy wanting to tear down those walls. To rebuild and to make people's foundations strong, it takes time, cooperation and solid building materials. The mud bricks we made were made of dirt we loosened by stomping on it mixed with water the young village kids fetched for us. After many trips up and down the hill cheerfully carrying the heavy jerrycans of water in the scorching heat, I felt they should hydrate themselves with some water. As I tipped the jerrycan by their mouths, they waited in anticipation of the splash of water to reach their mouths. As they gulped the water down, they were conscious of whether they were drinking too much or not as there were other kids waiting their turn. The satisfaction on their young faces brought me joy. God desires to pour His blessing and wisdom onto us. Do we eagerly thirst for His presence and knowledge? Are we walking those miles no matter how strenuous it is to serve Him cheerfully? We need the living water and it's source, God, to help us build a good solid foundation. Just like we needed the water to mix with the mud and the sun to dry the bricks to make them solid enough to build long-lasting walls, our lives and the lives we have a part in rebuilding need the constant source of living water to continue feeding and growing the lives of the Rwandese.

Golden Nuggets

"He who has ears, let him hear." Matthew 13:9

Being in Rwanda we experience what it is like to be in Heaven and Hell all at the same time. Many lives are precariously teetering on the brink of being lifted up or falling down to doom. It is through those who are dedicated that persistently go and speak to the people and lift them up. Defeats are many but victories bring glory to God.





2 years ago, a 12 year-old orphan Emmanuel caught my heart when I heard he was living in the sewers by the market he was working at helping to make charcoal. It took months to find him a home and he started to go to primary 1. A few months later, he was put out of the home and he was back in the streets again and working at the market. Then he disappeared. I prayed for a year not knowing where he was or if he was alive or taken into forced labour. Then this year, I was surprised to see him at the school we were doing an outreach to streetkids at. He was the first person I saw when I got of the bus there, and after we found each other again, we couldn't let go of each other. Now a bit taller, 14 year-old Emmanuel is in Primary 3 and I thank God he has a bed to sleep on every night and food to eat everyday. He has heard my prayers to take care and protect this precious life. I have never seen him smile so big and I now know that he is off the drugs he was on when I saw him before. With a few special phrases in Kinyarwanda, like golden nuggets, we could communicate to each other, but even more through our actions. Through a translator I encouraged Emmanuel and told him how proud I was of him to be working hard at school. He promised me he will work hard at school and wants to one day work for a district government to ensure that people were able to get help if they needed it. He will one day be a leader in society, that's my boy. Let them hear you say, please let them hear and let it stay in their hearts and take root in their lives.

A Permanent Home

"He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished." 1 Chronicles 28:20

15 years after the Genocide destroyed Rwandan society, we have seen the hope and love that only God can give. As we work alongside our local Rwandan brothers and sisters, we know how much heart and toil it takes to bring others to truly trust and know God. They are my family it's hard to separate us anymore and may we continue to build each other up. We will continue to build the Rwandese lives and rebuild the nation alongside them.

This year when we were at Kiyensi refugee camp, another place for returning Rwandese refugees from Tanzania, we saw how they had no church. A YWAM outreach team already built the foundations of the new church and then ran out of funds. As we prayed on the foundations at dusk one night, I knew we had a part in helping them to build their "temple", a place to worship. Just like Nehemiah who prayed for the walls of Jerusalem to be built, we prayed for provision to build the walls of this new church. With our love offering money we brought over, we were able to contribute to over 6000 mud and concrete bricks for the walls and we're still praying for the church to be complete with roof. Even though the walls have been torn down, we will help to rebuild the people's lives and their nation. May the displaced who feel they have no home, may the orphans who have no parents, may the helpless and harassed know they have a home with our Heavenly Father.



1 Chronicles 28:19-21

"All this," David said, "I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan."

David also said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished. The divisions of the priests and Levites are ready for all the work on the temple of God, and every willing man skilled in any craft will help you in all the work. The officials and all the people will obey your every command."

Jean Pierre of Rwanda - "I'll praise You with my voice, Jesus" From the journal of Priscilla Wong



The thing I treasure most about this trip was the lifsongs I heard. We spent a lot of time doing that and what beautiful melodies of God's love, grace, faithfulness and goodness we heard. We visited Esther, a young mother with burdened shoulders and downcast eyes, who was abandoned by an unfaithful husband who had infected her with HIV. We visited the homes of young women like Jocelyn and Vistine, who were compelled to sell their bodies to strangers for sex whenever they or their babies were hungry for food. We went to Busanza and Kimisigara, two neighbourhoods populated with streetkids, and watched those kids pursue their dreams of playing soccer on an open field against a backdrop of Rwanda's beautiful landscape of rolling hills and rich terracotta red.

I came to know Jesus Christ as an adult during university years. As I approached Christianity, I was cynical, stubborn and very self-reliant. It was because I was very broken from the events that had occurred in my life during that time, that (perhaps reluctantly) I came to really realise how helpless and weak I am, and how big and faithful our sovereign King is. Not unlike many people who become Christians in their adulthood, my journey to Christ was marked with a lot of "testing" of Christianity - challenging intellectually the bases of its claims and asking "what's in it for me?". Even when I came to know Christ, admittedly I found it hard to accept stories of children inviting Jesus into their hearts at a young age. "How could they know and understand," I'd try to rationalise in my head. But through the lifsongs which I've had the privilege of hearing over these years, I have been humbled and have marvelled at the realness of God and how He has truly been present on this earth ever since the beginning of time. If only we would see and receive Him with eyes and hearts as pure as those of the little children that Jesus beckons to Him.

We went to Rwanda this year equipped with a notebook, pen and video camera to take down the life stories of some of the people that we met. I'd like to share with you the story of Jean Pierre, a 14-year old that we met who has lived on the streets of Kigali for as long as he could remember. I met Jean Pierre one day as we were in crowded Remera, a bustling transport hub. He came and clung unto my Rwandese friend, Serieux, like a koala bear hugging a Eucalyptus tree back home in Australia. We realised that it was a boy with a beautiful smile and bright eyes called Jean Pierre. Serieux told us that Jean Pierre was part of his ministry, Harvesters. Harvesters reaches out to young children and youths, most of them living on the streets or are from really poor families.





Jean Pierre and Serieux started talking and then Serieux said to us, "This boy is amazing. He is really gifted at singing." We were very surprised and so, in the middle of Remera, we asked Jean Pierre to sing for us. He cleared his throat and he sang unabashedly with an amazing, bold and joyful voice. We were so taken aback that we invited him to meet us again at our base so that we could record his singing. Since he's a streetkid and only 14 years old, we had to set a time with him since there was no way of contacting him. We asked him to find us at our base two days later. He gestured a "yes" in agreement with a quick raising of his eyebrows and nod of his head (so characteristic of Rwandese body language) and quickly ran off and disappeared into the crowd. I was half-wondering whether he'd really remember, and whether we'd really get to see him again and hear him sing.

On the morning we had arranged to meet, I stayed on the base waiting for Jean Pierre to come. Surely enough, he arrived and greeted us with a wide smile on his face. God's timing was perfect because he had come just as Jon and Ross were arriving the base from the airport after their flights from Hong Kong. They hadn't even taken their luggage off the van when we hurriedly ushered them into our room so that they could do what they do best and help us with the recording. Jon picked up the guitar and Ross started connecting the cables to the sound equipment we had brought from Hong Kong. Our friend, Didier, now a YWAM missionary, had also just arrived after having welcomed Jon and Ross at the airport. He was perfect as our translator as he was himself formerly a kid who had lived on the streets and came to see Jean Pierre as his brother through the similar past that they share.

Once Jon sat down with the guitar and Ross' recording station was ready, Jean Pierre just took off and started freestyle singing. Jon's guitar accompanied him and I was amazed at this natural, raw talent which I'd never seen before. As he continued to sing and share his life with us, his story unfolded. Jean Pierre told us that he has never known his parents. At the age of 3, an aunty who had taken him in had abandoned him in a cardboard box at a crossing on the street. The years that followed involved Jean Pierre living alone on the streets, and sometimes finding himself being invited into homes of strangers for short spells where he would be verbally abused, rejected, treated badly and constantly reminded that he was worthless and belonged on the streets.

I was perplexed at how a boy who had endured such harsh conditions and abuse could be standing before me singing with joy. Jean Pierre said that ever since he was young, he'd always have these songs in his heart that he'd want to sing out. It was his gift. He came to know about Jesus when he went to a concert where a Christian singer sang and shared his testimony to the crowd. It turned out that this singer, Emile, was also someone that our team knows and is now one of Rwanda's biggest music producers. After Jean Pierre heard Emile share about how God had lifted him out of his former life as a streetkid, Jean Pierre came to see that God could do the same for him and he yearned for Jesus' presence in his life. That night he received Jesus into his heart. From that point on, he started singing all his songs about God - talking about what God has done for him. The songs he sang for us were all songs about Jesus which he made up right before us to the tune that Jon was also composing impromptu. Jean Pierre and Jon had just met, but like long-acquainted music companions, the two managed to make up wonderful songs - there was no "take 2". He really has an amazing gift from God.

Jean Pierre shared his dreams and visions with us. One day he wants to open an orphanage for streetkids like him with no parents and no home. He wants them to know God just like he has come to know God. He also told us that when he is sad, he finds a lot of comfort from Psalm 23 as he once heard someone preach about it. He knows that Jesus is his Shepherd even when he walks through the valleys of loneliness. When we asked him how we could pray for him, he said he wants to find a stable home and to go to school to learn how to read and write so that his dream of opening an orphanage may be a reality. It was that simple - the opportunity to have a home and to go to school.

"THE THING I TREASURE MOST ABOUT THIS TRIP WAS THE LIFESONGS I HEARD"

The thing which struck me the most about this boy was that he had so much joy. Despite the harsh conditions he lived in, with no one to love him and take care of him, he had a lot of joy. I can't say that a lot of people (even adults, and myself included) living in similar (or better) circumstances would be responding to such a life in the same way. We have seen that extreme poverty can choke and rob a person of real joy in their hearts - it can cause people to be hardened, tired, weary and bitter. You could see it in their eyes - looking gaunt and hollow. But in Jean Pierre (and thankfully, a lot of the streetkids I saw in Rwanda who our friends minister to), I saw that the childlike joy and gentleness were preserved in his heart. And I know the difference is that despite



the fact that he is physically alone, he knows that he is never really "alone" for God is with him always. For a boy who really has nothing -- he *knows* what he has. He's been through so much we haven't ever been through, and Jesus is something that he is so sure and convicted of.

After he finished with the songs for us, we gave him some clothes and an old pair of shoes and bus fare so he can go back to the place he was planning to stay that day. He left with a big wave and smile, and I didn't know how we'd be able to contact him again. But my friends assured us that we'd be able to find him somehow. At least I know that God knows where he is.

Lifesongs like these certainly warm the heart and bring tears to one's eyes. Through Jean Pierre's story, I am extremely grateful that God gave me an opportunity to share a testimony of His love with my non-Christian family members and I know that God also touched their hearts. But most importantly through every one of those lives, I've come to learn more about our Heavenly Father - His character, His love, His power and His plans for His people. And I wanted to bring these lives back to Hong Kong to share with you because God has shown me that in His eyes, each of those people is worthy and precious and is not forgotten on the streets of a small country in East Africa. Jean Pierre is a boy I saw last month - who gave me a hug and shared his life with us.

"HOW BLESSED I AM THAT HE MADE ME TO KNOW HIM"



Through our own journeys with God and in witnessing God's hand in the lives of others, all of God's children know that once you've tasted God's grace and goodness, you're never the same again. "What do you do when your life has been touched in such a way that you are not the same, and that things can never be the same again? How do you return back to the old life and surroundings that you live in when your body is now adorned with new clothes? How can I look at the world through my eyes again, after I've seen through Yours? Something deep within has moved. Something has shifted and I can feel the ripple effects. Lord, I know You're constantly moving. Never did I imagine that this trip would have such a profound effect - but You have indeed shown me that Your thoughts are not my thoughts, and Your ways are not my ways. Lord, teach me how to love like You have loved me." These are some of the thoughts which I penned in my journal a few days after returning back from Rwanda for the second time this year. As I continue to journey with Jesus through the valleys and the mountaintops, I realise increasingly how rich, abundant and full He intends for each of our lives to be. How deep is His unconditional love for us. How blessed I am that He made me to know Him.

"Who made me to differ, but thee? For I was no more ready to receive Christ than were others. I could not have begun to love thee hadst thou not first loved me, or been willing unless thou hadst first made me so. O that such a crown should fit the head of such a sinner! Such high advancement be for an unfruitful person! Such joys for so vile a rebel!"

(from The Mover, a Puritan prayer from "The Valley of Vision")



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