



FAR REACHING
MINISTRIES



CHRISTMAS UPDATE

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ECHOES OF ETERNITY

Six weeks ago, Michael and Lino, my two senior chaplains, were summoned to Juba, the capital of South Sudan, by a South Sudan People's Defense Force (SSPDF) Commanding General. A vehicle was spotted just 100 yards ahead, as they closed the distance between the two, gunfire erupted. Michael hit the brakes and told the soldiers, "Go to guns," knowing instinctively that in an ambush like this, more rebels were close by. The rebels outnumbered us. Michael knew a mobile unit from the SSPDF Security Branch was only about 10 miles away, so he immediately radioed for help—fortunately, the unit responded quickly.

These rebels are notorious for forcing children to be child soldiers or slaves and women are frequently used as sex slaves. The initial barrage of gunfire killed one adult and one child. They surrounded the vehicles attempting to seize any women and children. They fled with five children, and I am not certain how many women were taken.

When the reinforcements arrived, the battle plan was to intercept the rebels. Everyone acted with speed and precision, determined to rescue the children. They were able to out flank the enemy.

Rather than surrender, when the rebels recognized they were surrounded, a fierce firefight ensued. Let me explain what a firefight can be like: from one moment to

the next, you are not sure if you are going to be killed. It's imperative to put your trust in the Lord, knowing that your time is in His hands. Training and discipline determine who survives and who dies. King David knew from experience that God is our Refuge and very present Help as we face our enemies and fierce battles rage. He wrote in Psalm 27, "The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" It is amazing that while under fire, you can experience such a great calm.

Through the course of the battle, every guerrilla rebel was killed not by design, but because they continued to put the lives of children in harm's way. This dealt a crippling blow to the entire Insurgent Force seeking to rob, steal, and destroy the fragile peace in South Sudan. The quick action of Michael and the chaplains saved these civilians from a life of slavery, rape, and tyranny. Thankfully, all the children were unharmed and safely returned to their families.

Given such threatening circumstances, most men would have retreated, concerned for their own lives, but this is not the character of our chaplains. These men embodied the role of godly men—to protect the vulnerable and to defend women and children. Michael, who is my senior chaplain, has five children of his own, but he and his wife, Beatrice, have also adopted 18 children. Many of these orphans had God fearing fathers, who died serving Jesus Christ as a chaplain at the front lines. Michael has always been unique among men. His motto is to do what is right in God's eyes and do it immediately. When difficult things need to be done, he does not consider what is prudent or safe but what would be the heart of the Lord in the matter.

Lino has survived through a tremendous amount of combat. He was sent, by his father, to be a soldier when he was 12 years old, and even killed a lion while he was still a young man. He has been shot five times in combat, including once in the head. Even though Lino is well seasoned in combat, he is the head of our children's ministry at the chaplain base. Every child in our village wants to grow up and be like him; to them, he is a great hero. Lino told me that once he had been in a battle that lasted for several days. So many men were killed that the two commanders of the opposing armies, came together and said that they would fight another day, then the armies parted ways. He went on to say that they cried for their fallen brothers for a day, then went back to battle.



CHAPLAIN MICHAEL

I once asked Lino if he ever felt fear and he responded, “No. I just fight.”

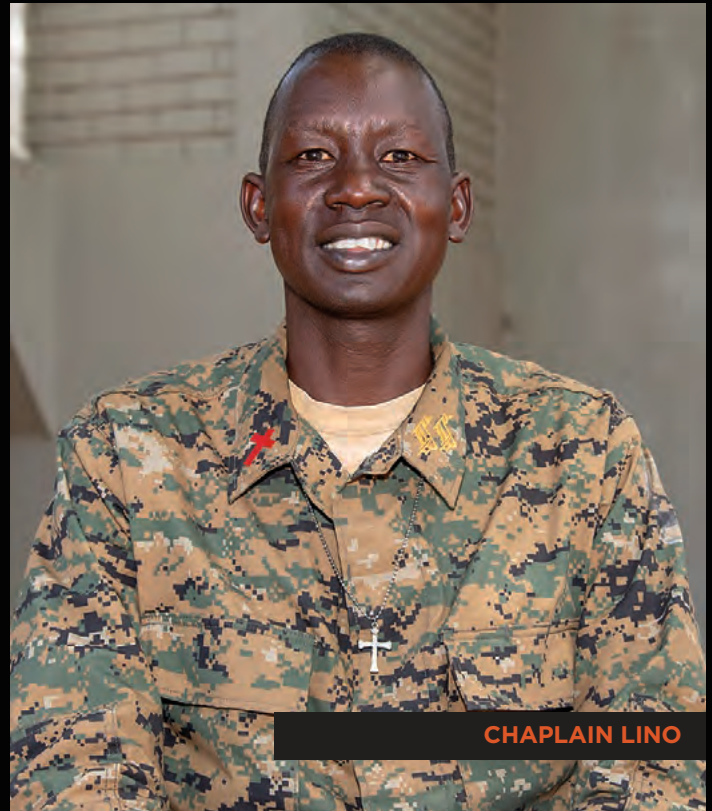
What we all need to remember is that each of us will have a legacy. How we live our life will resonate through all eternity. One thing about Michael and Lino is that the thought of a bullet or loss of life is not going to stop them from being the men who God created them to be. They knew that they were put on this earth to serve Christ and to protect others.

Both Michael and Lino turned a corner in ministry many years ago. Both made the decision that the life given for the Cross is a great gift. Both have endured tremendous trials and war, and their rewards in eternity will be great. In all likelihood, there will be many more days before this war is over, and the men will continue to fight. One day, they will look back and remember that they were once young, but they will have no memory of wasting their lives. Most people will never see men, women, and children die in front of them, so they cannot understand the cost of discipleship in war-torn nations.

Recently, I was pondering the last 25 years that I have served in South Sudan, and asked the Lord, “Will I ever be finished with war? Will I ever know peace again in this life?” Twenty-five years is a long time for a man to fight. And, what I felt as I sought Christ was that He was saying that you will never stop fighting in this life. The world we are living in is racing towards eternity, and as a nation, the United States is in a dark time of our history. Good is called evil, and evil is called good, just as Christ warned us it would be at the end of days. The Lord went on to speak to my heart, you will have to gird up the loins of your mind.

While difficult to understand, after so many years of war, at least I now have my marching orders and I know the course for the rest of my life.

I recently met with several friends of mine for dinner. As I spoke with each of them, they were all truly serving Christ, doing extreme ministry in very difficult places in the world. One shared of his work in Nigeria, where Christians were being skinned alive for Christ; yet they would not renounce their faith. His wife shared the testimony of a 12-year-old girl who was abducted by Boko Haram from her school. She was held for two years; daily, she was beaten, raped, and indoctrinated with their radical religious views. After giving birth they told her that if she would just renounce her faith in Jesus Christ, and become a jihadist Muslim, she would be released. She was one brave young woman who refused to deny



Christ. Yet, others who were also abducted and given the same opportunity to renounce Christ were set free and have shared her story. She witnesses to everyone, even the Boko Haram leaders. She disciples the young girls who are in captivity and she has earned the respect of these men because of her unwavering faith. The men went on to share how Christ is visiting many radicals in dreams and visions, and how the Nigerian believers' commitment to die for Christ, is having a profound impact on Muslims and many are coming to faith.

In the Kingdom, all of these will be great knights for they loved not their own lives. I do believe that we get to choose how we will be remembered in eternity.

At this time of year, we all love to hear the heartwarming stories that make us feel the Christmas spirit and I also appreciate them. But, when I ponder the testimonies of believers like these, I get a proper perspective. Because the soldiers chose to value the lives of others more than their own, a group of children will spend this Christmas safely with their families.

My prayer is that we will all live lives that will echo through eternity and have a love for Christ that should have been but was rarely seen.

Merry Christmas,

Wes and Vicky Bentley

FOR ALL THE ABANDONED CHILDREN

I once heard of a five-year-old boy whose father took him down to the train station and said, “Son, sit here. I will be right back.” But the father would never return. It was his pathetic way of getting rid of his unwanted child. It is hard to believe that a parent could be so cold-hearted and lack any natural affection for their own child, but this, unfortunately, is the world we live in. Yet, in my own life, I have had the experience of not being wanted by my own father. When he and my mother divorced, he left and never returned or checked to see if we were okay. In the last 48 years, I have seen him a few times, but that was just to share Christ with him. What was so confusing was that before the divorce, he had been a good father. The last time I remember being happy, as a family, was in Birkenfeld, Germany, where my father was stationed in the Air Force. Over the last 20 years, I have returned there twice to see it. Two blocks from my childhood home was an abandoned castle. As an adult, I have walked around it, remembering how my brothers and I were so happy and carefree as children. It is comforting in one way, but you feel such a sense of loss at what could have been.

A couple weeks ago, Bigtha, one of our missionaries in Mexico, called to tell me about a little girl whose parents had sold her to a man when she was 11 years old, for \$2,500. The man got her pregnant but when she gave birth, he was dismayed that he now had two children to care for, so he took her back to her parents and demanded his \$2,500 back. Bigtha said, “Wes, she does not even have breasts.”



She went on to say how troubled she was by the thought that a grown man could not understand or care how wrong this is.

A few days later, Bigtha told me about three children who were roaming around the neighborhood unsupervised. The locals asked the children where their mother was, and they said that she told them she was leaving them and not coming back. The oldest was six and the youngest was just learning to walk. I asked Bigtha who was caring for the children, and she said the neighbors were trying to because they did not want the state to take them. I told Bigtha to find a good family who could care for them and Far Reaching Ministries would pay for their care. A couple days later she called to say that the mother had returned and was trying to take the children in order to sell them. Her intentions were to sell them to the mafia cartel who often purchase children, then put them on the streets to beg for money for 12 hours a day. The cartel takes the money, and the children receive nothing. When the girls become of age, sometimes even younger than a teenager, they are forced into prostitution. I immediately got into my car and drove down to Mexico. When we arrived, Bigtha informed me that they had located the grandmother of the three children, and she had three more children from the same daughter and would take these children as well.

After speaking to the children's grandmother, Bigtha learned that the grandmother loved the children, but that their living conditions are very poor. They all live in a one room shack, with dirt floors, a leaky roof, and no plumbing.

The grandmother went on to say that it is hard to care for them because she is so sick. Bigtha asked what the illness was, and she responded that they never have enough food to eat, so she let the children eat and her stomach hurts all the time. The grandmother informed us that some of her daughter's children did not even know who their mother was.

I asked Bigtha to pick up the kids and grandmother and bring them to Ensenada. So, she gathered them, and we met at Walmart. I then told Bigtha to get each of the kids two sets of trousers, shirts, underclothes, a pair of tennis shoes, a winter jacket and rain boots because they live where there is no grass and when it rains it is all mud. I also told the children that they could each pick out a toy, which none of them had ever had before. Of course, the girls all went for a doll and the boys went for a car.

Then, we proceeded to the grocery department where we purchased enough rice, beans, fruits, and vegetables, along with many cans of canned meat, to last the family for several months. When the children saw the cold milk, they all pointed to it and Bigtha said that we could not get it because they have no refrigeration. This being the case, we purchased about 20 cases of shelf-stable box milk, then I told the kids to go and pick out two boxes of cereal each. When we got to the cash register, they all wanted to help unload the shopping carts. I suspect for them to have been



inside a Walmart was as exciting for them as it is for most American children being at Disneyland.

From there, we proceeded to McDonald's. The kids had not only never been in one, but they had also never seen the city of Ensenada, even though they were only a few miles away. Each child received their very first Happy Meal along with

a sundae afterwards. As you can imagine, the kids were all smiles and never misbehaved a single time, neither at the store, nor the McDonald's. Afterward, the grandmother walked up to Ed Gauntt, my assistant, and said how thankful she was and that it was the first time her stomach had been full in a long time. Seeing the poverty this family is living in, we have decided to build a house for them. To construct a simple home, with basic plumbing, such as a toilet and shower, will cost about \$20,000.

It seems there is an unending list of needs and things that the Lord gives us to accomplish. As of now, it looks like we are going to start finding other children



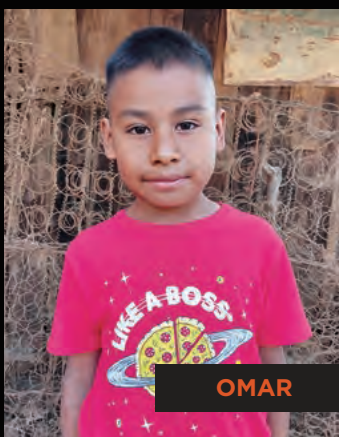
KARELY



SOFIA



KAMILA



OMAR



MITZI



LUIS

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in Mexico, who are in crisis, and provide a sponsorship for them so they can eat properly and go to school. We will accomplish this by facilitating a weekly Bible club for the children. To begin with, if you would like to sponsor one of these six children, please contact our office and we will assign one to you. The sponsorship will be \$50 per month for each child, and if you would like to help with the construction of the new home, we will make sure that it is built as fast as possible.

Folks, when my father left I was in the ninth grade, and a year later I joined the Marine Corps. Fortunately, the Lord allowed me to not only be able to handle this, but He used this to train me to understand what the needs of an unloved child would be. It gave me the ability to have great compassion and determination to rescue as many abandoned children as He would put in my path. While I wish for no child to go unloved, I realize that what God's Word says is true—All things work together for the good for those who love God. Hardship does shape us if we are willing. A person once said to me, "Wes, you cannot save everyone." While I acknowledge that, I can try.

Wes Bentley / Far Reaching Ministries



THE HOME THE CHILDREN LIVE IN

MEXICO CHILD SPONSORSHIP



Far Reaching Ministries (FRM) recently learned of six siblings, ages two to eleven years old, who were left abandoned by their mother on the street in Mexico. She simply told the children that she was leaving and not returning. Fortunately, their grandmother has been located but she, herself, survives on only \$25 a week. To make matters worse, she does not have a proper home for them—they sleep on dirt floors and do not have running water or plumbing. Thankfully, the Lord put this family in the path of FRM, and we will be making sure that the children stay with their grandmother, where they will be properly cared for and have enough food to eat. We will also be constructing a simple home for them, one with a proper foundation and a roof that does not leak.

If you would like to sponsor one of the children or assist with building them a home, the monthly sponsorships are \$50 each. The construction of a simple home with basic plumbing will cost about \$20,000. Kindly mark **"Mexico Child Sponsorship"** on the enclosed gift card. After we receive your request for sponsorship, we will send you information regarding a child so that you will know how to pray for him or her.

MEXICO CHRISTMAS OUTREACH



With Christmas quickly approaching, we are asking for donations of \$50 to provide a Christmas for a single family in Mexico. For this amount, we can provide toys, blankets, a Christmas celebration, along with enough groceries for a month. What a blessing for a family in need!

For a donation of \$500, we can provide for

10 families and for \$5,000 we can provide for 100 families. If you would like to be part of this outreach, please mark **"Mexico Christmas Outreach"** on the enclosed gift card along with your donation.



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