

EXTRA/EXTRA

August 2023

Dawn

A MISSION TRIP TO KENYA

Winnie, about six or seven years old, came to the clinic because she had a toothache. She opened her mouth wide and I saw the problem. Two of her back teeth were broken off. They looked painful. I work for a pediatric dentist. Helping kids get out of tooth pain is my favorite thing.

But we were not at my workplace. We were not even in the U.S. It was 2019 and we were in Nairobi, Kenya. There was no dentist on our mission team. All we could do was send Winnie home with ibuprofen to use as needed. It probably didn't last a week.

That was four years ago.

I have a picture of Winnie in my phone and have prayed for her mouth more times than I can count. The teeth that had broken off typically last until the age of 10 or 11 so she was in for a tough time. When kids break a tooth in very poor countries, they just press through the pain. The gums swell and overtake the broken tooth like lava from a volcano overtakes land. It's a bad situation.

This summer, we are going back to Kenya, and a dentist is on the mission team. MY dentist is going. We have the privilege of working a medical/dental clinic with kids and adults in the Kawangware Slum. Oh, how I hope we see Winnie!

Last week, I tried to explain the reason for mission trips-both home and away, to our youth in Sunday School. Kids (and adults) don't always listen, so I wanted to remind them what all the hoopla was about. They knew a group was going from our church. But did they know why?

There are many Bible verses that encourage us to help our neighbor. Even though Kenyans are thousands of miles away, they are still our neighbors, and are in need. Great need. We have ways to help them. I mentioned 1 Peter 4:10 to the class: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others..."

Our team is made up of men and women who will be doing just that. God will be using each one, their gifts, their occupations, their servant hearts to be the hands and feet of Jesus. When I shared "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required," (Luke 12:48) we all agreed that Americans have definitely been given much.

In *How to Deal with How You Feel*, James Merritt explains when we pray, we are inviting God to get involved. That thought has lingered in my mind for weeks. I WANT God involved. I NEED God involved-whether I'm going to Africa, work, Food City, or everywhere else.

We have asked God to get involved in our trip, on our trip, and all around our trip. I can't wait to see what He does! I'll have plenty of stories to share.

LEAVING AFRICA

Let's begin at the end. I am writing this on the plane. We are boarded and ready to back away from Gate Five in Nairobi, Kenya.

The captain has just finished making the traditional announcements in both German and English. The flight attendants have shown the obligatory video regarding every emergency imaginable. We are heading home.

It has been an amazing week working with World Hope. Our mission team, made up of volunteers from Kentucky and Florida, provided a medical/dental clinic for the people of the Kawangware slum and the children of Hope School, made up of kids from the slum. (People in Kawangware have extremely hard lives. Many of the people living there survive on two dollars or less a day.)

We are bone tired. Exhausted. Excited to be going back to the US, yet leaving a part of our hearts in Africa.

As the plane begins to move, my heart is full of thanksgiving. Have you ever been so overjoyed you could just write a Psalm? That's me at this moment. I am feeling David's words in Psalm 8:4: "What is man that you are mindful of him?"

For months, this group has been bathed in prayer. We prayed for the Lord to build the team. And He did.

We prayed for the Lord to prepare each team member. And He did.

We prayed the Lord would unify the Kentucky and Florida volunteers. And He did-beyond our wildest imagination. We were strangers stitched perfectly together like a beautiful Appalachian quilt; each one connected and working together in hard circumstances. It was a wonderful example of the body of Christ.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus calls each of us to be His witnesses, in our local area (Jerusalem), in our state and country, (Judea and Samaria), and to the ends of the earth. It's been my experience that it doesn't always mean to the farthest place away, but often to the last place or person you'd plan to go to. (The story of Jonah and Nineveh comes to mind.) Years ago, Africa was not on my radar. I had prayed for others to go, for God to help them on their way, but didn't expect to be one of them. He began to stir my heart. Soon I could think of nothing else.

A foreign mission trip serves many good purposes. First, it is an opportunity to use our gifts to serve those in need, per 1 Peter 4:10. Every summer in Nairobi, World Hope hosts a medical clinic the latter part of June. Summer in the U.S. is winter in Kenya so the "medical camp," as they call it, is crucial. Last week, pharmacists, doctors, a dentist, and a host of others provided much needed care for a people group in desperate need. The gospel was shared with each one.

Nine hundred ninety-six people were seen in the clinic, with more than 100 treated by the dentist. The most important part was that 29 patients invited Jesus into their hearts. They are already being connected to discipleship groups.

Foreign missions can help put priorities in order. At home in the US, we are often overwhelmed and busy with everyday life. A far away trip to help those in great need can help us refocus on serving the Lord, day in and day out right where we live.

Though we are traveling back to the US, our mission is not over. We are leaving "the ends of the earth" to go home and reach our "Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria."

WHAT'S NEXT?

My co-worker Michelle gave her heart to Jesus when she was 14 years old. Over the years, she has served at her church in many ways: children's church, Sunday School, VBS, and wherever needed.

Months ago, her new pastor asked the congregation, "What's next?" Yes, they were loving and serving the Lord, but what was next? That question took root in Michelle's spirit. She felt something was coming.

In November, our dentist/boss committed to a mission trip with World Hope to Nairobi, Kenya. Michelle blurted out, "I want to go!" but then caught her breath. She was instantly afraid and tried to suck the words back in. Could she really do it?

Michelle had wanted to go on a mission trip before but hadn't. Yes, it was very far away, but this would really be the perfect set-up. Her boss of 26 years was going, so she would feel safe. I was going-her good friend-so she would not be alone.

First Peter 4:10 tells us that everyone should use their gifts to serve others. Michelle is a hygienist. While she cleans teeth and gives good instruction on how to care for teeth, she also numbs patients before the dentist sits down to work. If you have ever had a filling or a tooth extracted, you know without a doubt that it needs to be numb. Her set of skills would be essential for a dental mission team.

Michelle's hygiene skill set was important but her greatest contribution would be her love. She is one of the most loving people I have ever met. I often pray to love more like Jesus, and Michelle. I knew her caring nature would be a blessing to so many in Kenya. Every day at work we talked about going; our excitement grew.

Michelle told her church that she had committed to go on a mission trip. They did everything right. They gave financial support, prayed for her, encouraged her, and the church kids made cards for her. She was the first in her church to go on a mission trip. Ever. And it was to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8)!

Before she even stepped on the plane, she had been an inspiration to adults and children alike. She was a pioneer: the first to go. They would always remember "Michelle went to Africa!"

During the prep for the trip, we fasted and prayed. The devil attacked fiercely and often. You know Who is greater? Exactly: The Lord in heaven! He met every need, directed through each difficulty.

In Nairobi, Kenya at the clinic, Michelle worked tirelessly on her feet. In the heat. And did not complain. She encouraged patients as she worked and others on our team.

I am thrilled she had the courage to follow God's leading. We have treasured memories (and laughs) we will hold in our hearts forever.

Just because we are home does not mean our mission is over. We are looking for other opportunities to serve. We want to be different because we know Jesus. We want to be different because we went to Kenya.

That's what was next for Michelle. What's next for you?