

Compassion International

There are numerous organizations around the globe that do wonderful things for children and their families in need. Most of us have seen the infomercials, where organizations take you to these poverty ridden countries (and some right here in the United States of America) and introduce the viewer to a way of life that most of us cannot imagine. We have all seen the images on magazine covers of starving children with their bloated bellies and their bulging, sad eyes---as pleading as they are desperate. My heart aches when I see poor women clinging to their babies and children—their faces full of despair and without hope.

Over the years, our family has given sporadically to charities that help these nations abroad where poverty is the norm and suffering is the predominant reality. Yet I will confess that most of our donations and time has gone to helping our immediate community---the one I am most connected with and the one I can actually SEE my time, money and efforts working in.

Last Sunday, our church had a guest speaker in the pulpit. His name was Pascal, and he was born and grew up in Rwanda—born to a poor farmer and his wife, in a remote and tiny village.

Pascal recounted his vivid memories as a child. After all, you don't forget what life is like when you are starving. When all you want and care about is just a few bites of food---these are not feelings you can wipe from your mind. Pascal remembered those pangs of hunger----pains so severe in fact, that he and his siblings would tie ropes around their stomachs to keep the rumblings at bay. Their tactics never worked, and he said on the numerous nights when their father came home empty handed, they would cry, knowing the night would bring no sleep and unimaginable suffering.

On days when there was little or no food, Pascal remembered his mother would take a tomato and carefully slice a few slices of the precious fruit. Then, she would fill a large pot of water, add the tomato slices and boil the “soup.” This broth would serve the entire family of 10 children and two adults for lunch and dinner for the day. Pascal choked up when he told of three of his siblings dying from hunger and its related illnesses.

Even the fun times Pascal recounted were tainted with disturbing memories. For example, he remembered running through the village with his friends, but then he said the group would shrink in number and children would just disappear. He said nobody ever asked where the children went---everybody already knew they were gone from this earth.

Such things are beyond most of our comprehension. Hunger? Does that mean it is after noon and I have not had a bite since last night? How many times have I off-handedly said ‘I am starving!’ Most of us simply cannot imagine the hunger Pascal spoke of---or the agony his parents must have felt watching their children starve.

Choking back his own tears, Pascal began recounting memories he had from when Compassion International came to his village. He laughed when he described how strange

it was when the people brought cameras and took their pictures. Very soon after, Pascal learned a church in the United Kingdom had “adopted” him, and for the first time his family went to sleep with full bellies and a huge sack of dried beans in the corner of their hut. Pascal and his siblings were enrolled in school and given clothes and medical attention. Finally, Pascal’s life felt comfortable.

Then, in 1994, genocide came to Rwanda. During a 100-day period, radical militia groups slaughtered hundreds of thousands of innocent people. Some estimates are as high as 800,000 people ruthlessly murdered. Pascal himself came extremely close to being killed, but was miraculously spared. He wept as he told of walking 300 miles, separated from his family, frightened, hungry and not knowing what his future held.

Once again, Compassion International saved Pascal’s life, rescuing him from Rwanda and eventually sending him to a boarding school where he would receive an education and a chance at a “normal” life. And yet those horrific images from his childhood are forever burned into his mind.

Pascal now travels the world, speaking about Compassion International and asking for people to help the organization in their quest to help children. Compassion was founded by Reverend Everett Swanson in 1952, and began by providing Korean War orphans food, shelter, education, and health care. Today, Compassion helps more than 800,000 children in more than 20 countries. For more information about Compassion, check out their web site at www.compassion.com

With our busy lives and tight budgets, it is often easier to focus on our own families and immediate surroundings. But by spending some time looking out into the world, you will no doubt see an area where you can help---all without leaving your home! Pascal’s words serve as a reminder to all of us that we CAN make a difference. Your donations can do more than save a single child from starving---you can help change a person’s life by giving them hope. Who knows if that person may go on to help change the world?