

Fingerprints: Learning and boldness

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This post was written by Mary Diane Deysher, the wife of Mark Deysher. Mark is the Executive Director at CURE Malawi.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to go into some of the villages outside of Blantyre to help with medical clinics and be part of the healing ministry. With my inexperience and lack of skill in all things medical, I am humbled that I can still lighten the burden of medical providers by taking blood pressures, doing malaria tests, fitting reading glasses, and holding children.



In the first clinic I joined, we noticed several small children wearing charms around their necks. These were given by a village “doctor.” The young Malawian volunteer who was working with us asked the mother about this each time. I could not understand the conversations, but I could hear a bold tone as this sweet young woman spoke to each mom. I saw a sheepish response, a downward glance, a slow nodding from the mom, and soon, our translator was cutting the string away from the child’s neck. Eye-contact restored, the mom smiled and received the warm reassurance that followed.



When I asked what she said, my co-worker said that she asked if this young mom believed that this child was a gift from God and affirmed God's love for this child. She challenged her to trust God for her child and not the charm. I was also challenged by the interactions I was witnessing: the brokenness, the boldness, the response, and the restoration. There is brokenness all around us, in and through us. We are called to that boldness in dealing with brokenness, trusting in the response and the restoration that follows.

It is a privilege to hold the hands of the elderly whose lives hold stories I only wish I could hear and understand. But these hands silently speak so much of their stories, their experiences, their joy and their pain. At the clinic, these hands belong mostly to women, some in their 70s, so tiny and frail, yet walking around with dangerously high blood pressure due to inadequate hydration and unbalanced diet, stress, and exertion. Many of them have lost children or husbands to AIDS or other diseases. They work incredibly hard to survive. I reflect on so many things as the machine tightens the cuff around their arm, measures, and gives a reading. I look at their hands, their clothing, their eyes, face and hair, and the name on the medical record booklet that each one carries (their book of life). I pray that their names are also written in the Book of Life for eternity.



I have been meeting with a young man who wants to improve his English skills so that he can get a better job to provide for his family. We usually meet at the CURE cafe, but one day we decided to drive out to his village where I visited his home and I met his wife and son.

Through the stories Stephen has shared with me and my time in the villages, I have learned that for Malawian youth who cannot afford a private school education, the odds are stacked heavily against them to stay motivated and gain an adequate foundation to pass the exams required for a diploma. Even for those who are able to progress through the end of high school and subsequent training, the approach to learning from an early age presents a disadvantage compared to much of the world.



I have seen 12 to 15-pound toddlers in the villages who spend most of their time on their mothers' backs and lack the basic nutrition for healthy brain development let alone the opportunity to grow up with the benefit of blocks and puzzles and books. I've seen kids who are only able to attend school for three hours a day because lack of teachers, space, and books requires the school day to operate in two shifts. I hear of classrooms in which there is one desk for three students. So there might be a 16-year-old kid in a chair at a desk while another one is sitting on top of the desk and another on the floor beside it.

And I've seen an approach to learning which, though well-intentioned, is based on rote-memorization, where critical-thinking and problem-solving skills are lacking in much of the education.



I visited with a young man who helps out at the village clinics who is also studying to be an electrical engineer and tells others that he had to decide how badly he wanted to gain an education and make that his focus and goal. I was inspired by his determination and perseverance.

But with all these challenges, the hearts of the people I've met here are warm, humble, and grateful. They are tough and resilient in the face of such hardship. I thank God for the lessons He is teaching me through them.

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