

## **Why? Why? Why?** **Suffer the little children**

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Mexico City, Mexico (LAMNS) -- "If we can change them from the inside out, we know that they will be changed forever," I heard her say. But my human emotions intervened and I wanted to say, yes but meet their overwhelming material needs, their physical needs! Deep in my heart I believe what Margaret Roberts, a missionary serving with Latin America Mission who is working with several groups of street children in Mexico City, was saying. But the physical needs of the children were so great. It is what struck me first when I approached the sites where the children live in their despicable state.

I thought I had seen poverty, having lived in Ecuador and worked in a squatter community, but nothing compares to being with these children. Nothing totally prepared me for their condition, though the workers tried as we got off the subway and worked our way through the crowds on our way to the site. "You know they will be dirty. Shake their hand to greet them. They may misinterpret any show of affection because many have been physically or sexually abused. Most will be sniffing glue. They all have lice." What they did not mention was the strong smell of human feces, the scattered empty cans of glue from which they take their personal supply to keep them dulled to the world around them, nor the garbage, piles of clothes, and filthy sofas and arm chairs where they sleep. When the worker mentioned they would be dirty, I was thinking of a week or two of accumulation, not the reality of a couple of years without a bath or adequate cleaning.

As we approach the site, heads pop up from the sofas and chairs lined up under the overpass. We get closer to the dark, dirty, littered area to talk to the kids, and find one girl, probably about 12 or 13, too sleepy to get up. It took studying to realize it was a little girl. Her boy hair cut and hardened look made her blend in with the boys, most likely a defense mechanism. As they emerge from their cave-like home under an overpass, they bring with them their supply of glue and form a circle. Margaret takes out a deck of UNO cards, begins to deal the cards and we sit under the eucalyptus trees amongst the trash and play a game. For just a moment the children can be kids, playing a game and forgetting the world they live in.

Then comes the 15-minute Bible story and lesson, this time from Exodus where God had equipped the men with all that they needed to fight a battle. "God equips us for the battles we must fight, just as he did in the story and gives a plan to do battle." She goes on to share the Gospel. They listen intently if they have not wandered off to sniff glue "in secret". More points are made concerning the passage. What an important lesson for these kids. What battles they fight each day! There are temptations that those of us that live in other circumstances can only imagine, and would certainly not want to experience. There are temptations to steal, to fight against the system, specifically the police who abuse them, to become prostitutes at a very young age, to get into more serious crimes, sometimes just to survive in a society that rejects, exploits or does not want to acknowledge them or that a problem exists.

Then comes the food. Before we got on the subway, one of the workers had picked up a bucket of beans and another a bucket of a rice dish. While the games and Bible lesson were in progress they went for hot tortillas. Each child is served a helping of the beans or rice on a tortilla. They reach eagerly for it with hands that have not been washed in days and devour it heartily, asking for seconds that they get until the supply runs out.

There is a little clean up, not much as the ground is already so littered it is hard to say what was left this time. Then one twelve-year-old needs a little first aid to clean and dress a cut that will get very infected unless treated. Everyone watches intently as the worker takes out an antibiotic salve and fresh bandage, cleans only the area around the cut and puts on the bandage. Another child informs the worker that he too has a cut, and though no one can see it, the worker patiently puts a little salve and a bandage on the area that he indicates "hurts a lot". The hurt is so deep he doesn't really know its source. There is so much that hurts in these children, so much that needs more than a bandage! So much goes so deep that no bandage will ever reach it. Except.....

Yes! Yes, "... if we can change them from the inside out, we know they will be changed forever"! This small attempt to reach the 250,000 children of the street, is a drop in the bucket to save the children of the world at risk, but it is an attempt to save *this* corner of the world where the needs are so great. God will honor that, I am sure.

We left the site, but it did not leave my mind. I am certain it never will. I have asked myself a million whys since that day? Why these children? Why not your child or mine? Why are they where they are? Why can't they get themselves out of it? Why don't they want to? -Or do they? Why do we close our eyes to the world around us? Why do we worry about dandelions in the parking lot of our church when there are children to be helped? Why do we worry about donuts for Sunday School when 250,00 children in Mexico City (and who knows around the world) do not know from where or when their next meal will come? Why are children raising each other with so little adult care, supervision or concern? Why do we numb ourselves to the world and what is going on?

Why are we afraid to step out of our comfort zone? Why should we worry about new carpet in our house when there is a center so desperately needed to get these kids off the street? Why? Why? Why?

"Suffer the little children to come unto me. For such is the kingdom of God."

"What ever you do to the least of these, you have done it unto me."

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