

A Story of Inspiration

BY THERESA PATTON

Evelyn still lay awake in bed that damp, chilly fall night. She stared at the ceiling, not satisfied with our simple, routine prayer, a prayer for the hungry to find a meal tonight; a prayer for the kids without beds to have soft place to lay their heads; a request and a hope that everyone would find comfort and warmth tonight.

Trying to teach my kids about gratitude in a culture of insatiable consumerism, we've made it a nightly ritual to pray for those who do not have a bed, or a home or a meal.

"But why, mama...why doesn't God give them food to eat?" my three-year-old daughter asked with genuine concern and frustration.

Caught off guard by this sudden question, the silence that followed was a bit awkward and made me realize that I didn't have a good answer for my pensive daughter. Her question was relevant, real and raw. It addressed a questioned that I think all people ask and struggle with, "why do some people seem to have so much, while others seem to struggle to survive?" Her unanswered question hung uncomfortably in the dark bedroom.

The following morning at breakfast I said, "Evie, you know that question you asked me last night before you went to bed...you know, why do some people have so much and some don't even have a meal at night?" She stopped what she was doing and looked at me with expectation in her eyes.

"Well, I want to respond to that. You see, not everything in life is exactly fair. We live in a world that is broken. We need to be grateful for the good things we have." I

could see her veil of innocence being slightly torn away. My husband and I felt like it was equally important to empower her to do something about it. We wanted her to feel the satisfaction of being a small part of a solution. "You see, when we have more



and some people don't have enough, we are responsible to fill that gap and fix that need with the abundance that has been given to us. It is our job."

She looked at me, processing all I said. "I want to," she replied, simply and sincerely. "I want to feed the kids that don't have anything to eat."

"Do you want to send them money?" I opened a magazine that was laying on our table. I pointed to a little African boy with dark, hopeful eyes.

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "I want to help him."

"Evie, what can you do to feed this boy?" She looked confused.

I continued to further explain my reasoning. "Food costs money. Money is earned by working or selling something that people want to buy. Do you have any skills that could earn you money?"

Evie really didn't know how to respond. She looked around the kitchen, searching for an answer to my question. On our kitchen table were a few half drawn rainbow pictures. She spends a lot of her time painting and drawing pictures of rainbows, sunshine and blue skies. She creates each scene with precision and care, each color intentionally added, each cloud and sunshine placed above to create a picture that exudes happiness. On the bottom, she practices signing her name. "These rainbows here make me smile, Evie. What if you drew lots of rainbows and sold them for a dollar and sent all the money to feed that boy in Africa?!"

She looked at me with determination in her dark eyes. "Yes. I want to draw rainbows and send money to Africa." Immediately she sat down and began meticulously drawing one rainbow postcard after another.

She painted and colored and crafted those rainbow postcards every spare moment she had. She loved that little boy in the picture. Each stroke of color was part of a promise that life would get better for him.

We announced to friends and family about Evie's Africa Rainbow project. Some people jumped right in, sending checks in the mail. Others approached Evie personally, handing her a dollar bill in exchange for one of her rainbows.

"Why are you selling those rainbows Evie?" one woman asked.

"To buy food for the little boy in Africa."

She handed Evie her dollar. Evie handed her a rainbow. She happily took the dollar and put it into a jar in the family room.

I am humbled when I think of my three-year-old daughter. She has more



compassion, more enthusiasm and more motivation to do something about the injustice in this world than I do.

I realized that my simple prayers were incomplete. Faith and vision without action is dead, and Evie's concern and energy has ignited a renewed sense of hope and enthusiasm in me.

As we go into the holiday season, I encourage us all to replace our good intentioned thoughts and prayers with a verb.

A three-year-old girl in Tualatin sits at the kitchen table painting rainbows.

A three-year-old boy in Sudan is finally able to satisfy the ache in his empty stomach.

What rainbows can you paint today?



Theresa Patton has lived in Tualatin for a little over a year. She and her husband John keep busy raising their 3 1/2 year old daughter and 18 month old triplet boys. You can spot them around town in the bright blue three seater beast of a stroller.