

ORPHAN-CAUSING ISSUE: POVERTY

by Amber Cassady, orphan advocate

Written for World Orphans when Amber was a student at Texas A&M University

When was the last time you were without food or water and had no available resources to get the nourishment you needed? This desperation for basic needs is a foreign mindset for most reading this, but all too familiar for the 2.8 billion people across the globe who are living on less than \$2 a day. Six hundred million people within that population are orphans breaking out of the cycle they are caught in. Helpless children in a state of hunger and despair fall into lives of even deeper darkness. Some live in poverty because they are orphans, while others become orphans because of the effects of it.

For example, the need for money brings families to the point that they sell their children into slavery in order to have food on the table. Abandoned children are persuaded with false promises of being cared for into lives of soldiering or prostitution. The lack of resources for clean water, healthy nutrition, and good hygiene that results from poverty leads to disabling or fatal diseases that rob the orphan of a productive life. In fact, it is estimated that every two minutes a child dies from AIDS and extreme poverty.⁸ This means that more than 9 million children under the age of 5 are dying each year. Two-thirds of these young deaths are considered preventable but are allowed to happen because of poverty.⁹ The facts keep revealing the magnitude of the devastating effects that poverty has on the abandoned and orphaned and may leave you wondering what life is really like for one of these children.

UNICEF provides stories that they have collected about the livelihood of children of impoverished backgrounds. Each of them are unique in their experiences but a common struggle of lacking what is needed for survival dictates their everyday lives in ways that we cannot even comprehend. For example, Ali is a 16-year-old boy who relies on a strenuous job of working in fields for extended hours to help feed himself and his siblings. He is only one of 40,000 youth working day in and day out to get by in Jordan.¹⁰ Unable to attend school, the future looks bleak for kids like Ali who cannot find better jobs without a decent education. Another story is of a Venezuelan girl, Yuleini, who was given to her grandmother to raise while her sixteen year old mother searched for work. She never was registered as a baby, so when her grandmother passed away and Yuleini was left again with her mother who lied to the schools that she did not have any documents because she did not have any parents. Now at only 13, Yuleini cares for her four younger siblings and does all the cooking and washing as her mother works from dawn until dusk.¹¹ Poverty's hold on this family affected multiple generations as the burdens of each one passed down to the next. The cycle continues.

Why are so many children in such great need? Has the Father turned his back on them in their state of destitution? To the worldly view it would seem so, but when looked at from a Biblical perspective it is clear that it is not the Father that has turned His back but His people. The Lord shows his concern for the poor in Psalm 12:5 (NIV), "The Lord replies, "I have seen violence done to the helpless, and I have heard the groans of the poor. Now I will rise up to rescue them, as they have longed for me to do." God clearly loves and watches out for the poor.

However, in our selfish nature we have blinded ourselves by ignorance or disobedience, while the Father is crying out for those who follow Him to open their eyes to see the needs of those who cannot help themselves. So devoted is the heart of God to the poor that those who turn away from people in poverty may not truly have His love within them. As 1 John 3:17 (NIV) says, "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"

Loving the poor enough to meet their needs is a response to God's love in the hearts of individuals. He gives wealth so that it will be shared from hearts of gratitude for all He has done. In fact He holds us responsible to give, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." (Luke 12:48b NIV) This does not mean merely handing out the excesses to check a giving quota off the "to-do" list and wipe our hands free of responsibility. Instead, true giving is characterized by the kind of sacrifice depicted by the Good Samaritan who gave his best to care for someone that the world would consider his enemy or by Boaz who choose to provide for Ruth as much as she and Naomi needed- true sacrifices from those whom God has given much to provide for the least of these. Probably one of the most beautiful stories of sacrificial giving is of the widow who gave the only two coins she had to live on for the Lord to use. Jesus was so pleased with her giving that he said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." (Mark 12:43-44 NIV) This is reiterated in Proverbs 19:17 (ESV) as He promises blessing to those caring for the poor, "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed."

There is hope. Biblical examples are an immense encouragement, but it also is motivating to see progress in issues being addressed among some of the world's most prominent leaders. The United Nations reported to MSNBC, "Global poverty can be cut in half by 2015 and eliminated by 2025 if the world's richest countries including the United States, Japan and Germany more than double aid to the poorest countries."⁴ An end could be accomplished, and thankfully advocates of the poor and the fatherless are not waiting for the government to take action.

Many organizations and individuals have caught on to what is happening, understood what the scriptures say about it, and mobilized to fight poverty and help orphans affected by it. Compassion International and World Vision both have sponsor-a-child programs that provide food, education, and other basic needs to children all over the world. With a touch of a button, one person can change a child's life forever and ultimately have an impact on them for eternity. Compassion also is breaking the cycle of poverty through a leadership development program to help young people be able to afford the education they need to lead their generation and the one to come in a fight for a better future for themselves and their respective communities. Kiva (www.kiva.org) provides microloans for entrepreneurs in underdeveloped countries that are starting small businesses to provide for themselves and boost their local economy. Though not all of these programs are directly related to the orphan, their causes do help orphans as they improve the environments that these children are surrounded by. These orphans are treasures worth investing our money, time and prayers in. You, too, can have a part in the eternal impact that results from His work being done to meet people's needs.

¹ Tearfund. www.tearfund.org.29 January, 2008.

⁴ Unicef. www.unicef.org/mdg/poverty.html.25 August, 2011.

- ⁱⁱⁱ Compassion. <http://www.compassion.com/poverty/poverty.htm>. 27 August, 2011.
- ^{iv} Unicef. http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/profiles/full_child3.php.26 August 2011.
- ^v Unicef. <http://cozay.com/WORLD-POVERTY-STORIES.php.26> August, 2011.
- ^{vi} United Nations. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6837045/ns/world_news/t/report-world-can-end-poverty/#.TlhaCGWDDk4.17 January 2005.