

Our Lives, They are in God's Hands

By Chris Sprague

Know that I am not one to flaunt myself. Listening to someone else as they share a part of themselves and tell their story befits me much more than sharing my own experiences. Blame it on introversion, lack of creativity, or just plain boringness, it is my preference to listen. So instead of sharing about *my* journey to Africa, let me share another, more pressing story. Know that while I may be writing this, my role in this story is small compared with what I have seen and heard. My role is merely to tell the story and reflect on it. It is the responsibility that has passed to me.

Today I met a woman named Rose. Rose is a native Ugandan. She is married with eleven children. Her life was hard enough trying to keep her family fed and clothed, the animals taken care of, the land cultivated, and the children safe, but at least her worries were kept at bay by the comfort and solace her home provided. The security her household gave her family went far beyond the practical. It did more than just keep the rain and wind out, trap the heat in at night, and house her children. The stability of having a place to call home provided a peace of mind for her. With a home, she and her children had a future and however hard her life may seem, that fact comforted her. With the passing of several events outside of Rose's control, she happened to end up seated in front of me with her family sprawled out on the ground around us, their many eyes fixed intently upon me. The mood was melancholic, as it was a privilege for me to be talking with her, but the circumstances that led me to her were quite regrettable.

Here is my role in this story. As part of my practicum for Food for the Hungry International's Go ED. program, I was charged with doing research and writing a report concerning a land dispute in Piswa between the native people and Uganda's Mt. Elgon National Park. This dispute has a long history, but suffice it to say that the national park will not allow people to live within its boundaries but the population density, lack of land, and exhaustion of natural resources in the area have seemingly forced people to move above the park lines in an effort to provide for their families. On February 16, 2008, the home that Rose had known for over 15 years was demolished as she and her family were evicted from the boundaries of the park. They left with what little resources they had, some potatoes and a few of their animals, and moved off the park boundaries.

Being faced with this reality, the reality of true physical poverty, was an overwhelming experience. Listening to the plight of Rose and of the hundreds of others like her made me question myself, the world around me, even God. I didn't have answers for these questions, nor do I have any clear answers now. But one man's words would provide a slight glimpse at what I think the true answer is. As my interview with Rose came to a conclusion, I asked the other men and women who had gathered if they had anything they would like to say. One man spoke up and in a quiet, humble voice spoke. "Me, I have nothing to say about what has happened and what will happen," He paused thoughtfully and continued, "Our lives, they are in God's hands."

As that man spoke, I was shown the reflection of my true self in his words. I saw my own reaction which was one of bitterness and anger, both at God and at those that had created this situation. I saw my own inadequacy to repair the lives of these people. I saw my own shortcomings. I was faced with the fact that it is ultimately God Who Is...

Several weeks later, after reporting the story of these people to Food for the Hungry in Uganda, Rose and the other evictees received aid in the form of blankets, shelter, food, and tools from both FHI and Samaritan's Purse. They still have a long hard road ahead of them, but with the aid they have received, their lives are a bit less difficult and it is easier for them to wake up each morning.

This encounter was the catalyst for my humility. As I've said, I don't have the answers to those profound questions, the questions of God, of injustice, of poverty. But, when faced with these questions and the world around me, I find myself slower to give in to frustration, confusion, and depression. After all, our lives, they are in God's hands.