

Gratitude

By Steve Nester

Reflecting on the past few years, I am extremely grateful to have returned recently from our eighth medical mission trip to Uganda. I am so humbled and thankful for everyone's prayers for this trip, including CPFI, as we were blessed with a great team from many different locales. We were also very blessed not to have the challenges we had in the past from Ugandan customs officials. We were even able to facilitate and stock our mobile pharmacies with the confiscated drugs from the National Drug Authority (similar to our FDA in the US) that we had brought in 2018. Almost all those medications were still 'in-date' and available to use for this year's medical clinics that we hosted in remote villages in Uganda. We still had to visit a local city pharmacy daily after each clinic to purchase a few medications that were depleted. Thankfully, they had local supplies in the small town of Mukono City so we didn't have to travel 2 hours miles away to Kampala. Our ministry verse this year was Isaiah 6:8, NIV – "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" Our diverse pharmacy group who said, "Here I am!" included 10 students, 2 professors from Palm Beach Atlantic University Gregory School of Pharmacy, a PGY1 resident, 3 returning PBA pharmacists, and 3 students from Belmont Pharmacy School.



We also had partnerships with other NGO's such as Hope Smiles, who facilitated dental treatment; and Sole Hope, an organization that educates people on how to eliminate jiggers (a parasitic insect). It was an enjoyable visit to their facility, where we received a tour and we purchased shoes to give to children during our medical clinics. A small team of 4 also joined us from a USA-based organization called Wings For Women, which focuses on empowering women, educating them on women's health issues, and offering free screenings along with birth control education and resources. I am extremely thankful for my wife, Lisa Sorensen, who is President of Word in Deed Ministries and coordinates all in-country details for the trip with expert precision.

I still feel intense gratitude as I recall my first trip to Uganda in 2012. I had met a man named Sylvester when we organized a men's group meeting in the village of Mpunge. Meeting him and his family and sharing our concerns for our families humbled me and helped me to be grateful for all that I have. The bond that was shared with this man of integrity was a vital factor in my decision to return to Uganda. Now, 7 years later, we were invited once again to visit Sylvester's farm located on Lake Victoria. Word in Deed Ministries has helped him with several farming projects, and Sylvester

wanted to report on the success of his crops by having us visit his land to see for ourselves. Upon arrival, after a very rugged trip through unpaved jungle roads, we were invited into his small home where his wife Rose and their five children live. They also care for 3 sons of his 2 brothers who had died of HIV. As soon as we entered Sylvester's home, he passed out his well-used, dog-eared hymnals and we all sang "Amazing Grace". Then Sylvester worshiped and praised God for all that He has given him. It was a powerful moment as my heart was convicted, being so blessed with all we have in America yet often not being grateful for our many blessings. We were served some fresh fish caught from the lake, then we set out to see their farm and the progress of the thousands of pineapples Sylvester had planted. It was a beautiful experience and forever a reminder of the need to always count our blessings and show God our gratitude.

Another blessing for which I have tremendous gratitude is our religious freedom. Uganda has relative freedom of religion, but there are still many challenges for their Christian leaders. Pastor Michael, one of the local leaders and now our friend, had recently received a threatening note left at his family's door. The note stated that if he did not leave the area, the church he pastors, and the school where he serves

as the headmaster, then harm would come upon his family. In Ugandan culture, jealousy is common – some people envy those who are more successful, so they often try to pull others down to their lower level. There is also much competition between the schools as they are often run like businesses. So far, the police and others have been unable to identify who wrote the note given to Pastor Michael. We will continue to encourage Michael and surround his family with prayers for their protection. We are grateful that – at least for now – this type of persecution is not a common occurrence here in the USA.

Our 5 clinics at 5 different villages included seeing over 700 medical patients, 199 dental patients, and filling over 2500 total Rx's. To God be the glory! With much gratitude, I pray that God will provide the resources for us to continue serving Him and spreading the good news of His love, wherever in the world we may be, through word and deed.



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Leave Your Fear Behind, Trust Him Fully

By Samantha Axtell

As a parent, many things may come across your mind that you would long for your child to experience in life. Most importantly, as a parent you desire to see your child grow in the fear and admonition of the Lord. In doing so, if a child professes to know the Lord, then the parent prays they produce fruit since God's word states that faith without works is dead. Another desire one may have is to see their child's faith lived out by sharing the Gospel with others. Lastly, a common longing many parents have for their children is to become more aware of those in need around them and to experience life outside of the "bubble." With the last being said, many parents are unsure how to best position their child for such an experience that would allow them to see the needs of others. One of the many ways to do this could include mission trip participation.

Several years ago, the opportunity arose to take our family overseas on a medical mission trip. Many questions flooded my mind, such as: *Are our children too young? What if something happens while we are there? What will they be exposed to while there? Will they be able to assist, or will they get too tired and/or disinterested in the activities? Is it safe? They have never flown before... will they be okay?* The "what ifs" continued to flood my thoughts.

The Lord was extremely kind as He always is and reminded me of His words in Philippians 4:6-7 [NASB] – "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." My husband and I prayed over the opportunity, asking God for His wisdom for our decision, and the Lord graciously provided us the guidance and peace that He promises. We agreed to join the trip as a family and we're so thankful we did.

The Lord had amazing things in store for us during that time. We could have never imagined it would impact our hearts as greatly as it did. People often say, "I went to serve and be a blessing, but instead I was the one who was blessed." This statement could not be more true with our mission trip experience. During our time overseas we conducted several medical clinics, which afforded us the opportunity to share the Gospel with hundreds of patients while they waited to be seen by a physician. The beauty of participating in medical missions is that the patients come with a desire for healing from their physical ailments, but we have the opportunity to share the Gospel with them, where true and eternal healing comes from. During these moments of sharing, the patients are willing to listen much more intently since their situations leave them in a vulnerable condition. What better opportunity is there than to share God's plan of salvation to an individual in such great need!

Throughout the trip, our children quickly adapted to unique transportation experiences, different lodging accommodations, and other nuisances; and they were viewed as an adventure instead of an annoyance. Their responses quickly reminded me of James chapter 1 where we are told to consider it joy when we face trials. How quickly we can respond by grumbling and complaining, instead of obeying Philippians 2:14 [NASB] where we are commanded to "do all things without grumbling or disputing". The Lord kindly reminded us of His goodness in all things, as He empowered our