

***“A father to the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy habitation. God makes a home for the lonely” (Psalm 68:5-6).***

Many of you know that in addition to my ongoing work in the U.S. and Russia, I have been training a cohort from Central and South America for the past 3 years. We have met in the central location of Medellin, Colombia. Now, I get to go and see each one at their own locations. I just returned from Ecuador visiting the ministries of *Light in the Darkness* and *Man of Peace*. I witnessed how they are implementing my training, teaching it to their respective staff, and conducted additional training. I also met the kids involved in the ministries and learned their stories. Here is one of their stories.



Imagine you are a 10-year-old child and you live with your mom, seven aunts, and eight siblings and cousins. There is one man in the house who is the current partner of one of your aunts. Your home is a 700 square foot metal shack. Your mom and aunts have no education beyond 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. A couple of them cannot even read. Daily life consists of survival, which is a terrible struggle. The women of the home do anything and everything, including selling themselves, to put food on the table. Often, they are not home at night. The gangs or cartels are a continual source of threat. You live in constant fear and are often hungry for days. Attendance at school is not possible without the mandatory uniforms your family cannot afford.

Now imagine this story playing out for tens of thousands of children in Central and South America and you begin to understand the problem and power of the gangs/cartels. How is this ever going to change? Where is the hope? You simply cannot incarcerate all of them. But there is hope. I saw it. God has His workers of the harvest shining through the dark landscapes in these countries.

Everyone who starts this kind of work does so to help the children find a way out. Typically, ministries start with some kind of food service, Bible Studies, and educational help. But it doesn't take long to realize if you really want to help the children get out, you need to help their moms, work with the schools, figure out how to navigate the gangs, advocate for the kids with government agencies when they are being abused or neglected, and help them heal from their significant trauma. Few missionaries are prepared for this.



Both ministries in Ecuador told me that receiving my training was a “game changer” that transformed the ways they worked with the kids, schools, and families. To be honest, I was humbled, inspired, challenged and amazed by my time there. Both of these ministries have taken my training and implemented it far beyond what I taught. They are in places with few human and material resources. Yet, their creativity and resourcefulness to use what they have has created spaces for the kids unparalleled to anything I have seen, and I was astounded at the Lord’s provision of incredibly gifted and professional staff.

Where did they all come from? I wish I had the space to tell you the stories and answered prayers! Some came to the ministries because of visions from the Lord. Some came because they started to see changes in the kids in the neighborhood and wanted to know what was happening. Some came as their own children came to Christ and shared the gospel with them, resulting in their coming to Him. The ripple effect throughout the broader community is so encouraging.



The gangs and cartels are still in control. The families are still poor and oppressed. But one by one, children are experiencing hope and envisioning a different future for themselves. They are experiencing the opportunity to go to school, receive healing from their trauma, and learn how to live in Christ. The mothers are learning how to heal their own stories and parent their children better. These ministries have become a safe place, a family and micro-community for these children and their mothers. Our Father in heaven is alive. And He loves to show Himself as a good Father, especially to the fatherless.

Thank you for being a powerful link in the chain to bring such hope and healing to all these children. Many of them will celebrate the baby Jesus as their Savior for the first time this Christmas! They and I are extremely grateful for your prayers and gifts of love.

For Links in the Chain,

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