

Fear vs. Faith on the Streets of Honduras

The Micah Project Summer 2008 Update

More and more, fear seems to be the default stance of modern society. The 24 hour cable news networks are full of it: be afraid of the economy, with it's rising prices and falling dollar; be afraid of the environment, with it's melting polar ice and rising temperatures; be afraid of terrorists, illegal immigrants, gangs, bad mortgages, credit card fraud, dwindling retirement accounts, foods that lead to cancer, mad cow, bird flu—the list goes on. The unceasing drumbeat of dreadful possibilities, whether real or imagined, causes us to want to withdraw into our bunkers and cover our heads while the world seems to fall apart around us.

As missionaries with the Micah Project here in the capital of Honduras, where even the Burger King has an armed guard posted at the door and every window in the city is protected behind iron bars, we are well-acquainted with the tendency to operate out of a sense of fear. And given the evidence, maybe it's not so unwarranted. In the last year, we've had our group home broken into twice, our car windows smashed, our young men threatened by gangs, and a boy killed in a drive by shooting about thirty feet from our front door. Even the police are scared of the drug dealer in our neighborhood who holds a weekly "happy hour" for kids under the age of 16: a free rock of crack for each one.

All of these things tempt us to begin to react to the world around us out of a sense of fear and self-protection. The problem with fear however, is that it is viral: once we begin to make some of our decisions out of fear, that mindset tends to invade everything else we do. Personally, I tend to get a severe case of the "what-ifs": What if the Micah Project fails? What if our young men choose the streets over the life we offer them? What if the yellow glue that they inhale is just too damaging to recover from? What if they can't make it through college? What if our dreams for the Micah Project's boys are too big? What if our loving heavenly Father just forgets about us, and leaves us to our own devices? The "what-ifs" can keep us in a defensive crouch--stop us from dreaming big and asking big things of God.

This year, God has sent me some large reminders to remind me to keep trusting Him and His plan for our lives: to keep living life based on faith rather than fear. One of those reminders came through a street punk who goes by the gang name Laje (lah-hay). Laje has ruled our barrio through fear and intimidation for many years. Street violence, gang activity, home evasions and car thefts were the way that Laje made his way through life. A few months ago, he threatened a couple of our young men and me when we didn't have any food to give him one evening after dinner when he had come to our door demanding to eat.

My fear of Laje had turned to resentment and anger, which boiled over after he broke into the Micah house a couple of months ago and stole a bike and some other things. The next day, when he was passing by our door, I flew out of the house in a rage with thoughts of revenge on my heart. God is good, though. . . and patient. . . and instead of giving Laje a piece of my mind, I began to give him a piece of God's good news. I told him that he was playing with God and running from him. We talked for

a long while about how God loves him as a father loves a wayward son, and wants him to run back into His loving embrace. At the end of over an hour, I told Laje that I would be praying that, within the next month, he would see the power of the living God and would be forever changed by it.

Amazingly, Laje began to come by the Micah House almost every other night to talk with me about faith and life. His countenance began to change: the smirk of intimidation faded as he began to trust me and listen to the words I said. He seemed to want to accept God's love for him, but could never quite get over the barriers that his life and experience had imposed. All that changed last week, however. Brian Wiggs, who will be bringing his family to work with the Micah Project in 2009, came to spend a week in Honduras with a group from his church. Brian's own life is a witness to the fact that God reaches us when we are at our lowest point. He spoke to Laje on four consecutive evenings; on the fifth night, Laje bowed his head and accepted Jesus as his savior. The next day, he was baptized in the pool of the hotel where the group was staying. A hardened and dangerous criminal was reborn into a son of the living God!

Laje's decision to run into his heavenly Father's arms hammers home a lesson that God has been trying to teach me throughout my ten years in Honduras: that He can transform the darkest of places and the darkest of lives. But we, as His people, must be willing to walk into those places carrying His light. If fear prevents us from going, then who will take the good news to people who so desperately need it?

I now thank God that He allowed Laje to break into our home. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But God used that terrifying night to show me that He is firmly in charge... even of the things that go bump in the night. This great truth is helping me to make daily decisions based on faith rather than fear. It helps me to look at the lives of the 22 boys who are currently part of our family and to dare them to be courageous in their dreams for the future. It helps me to take joy in the fact that little Marvincito just celebrated his first anniversary with us... having left the streets behind for good. But at the same time, it also helps me to look at little Wilmer... who has spent more time on the streets than off this year... and to not lose faith as he fights through his seemingly unbreakable addiction to yellow glue. The fact that God is in charge helps me to give Him the praise for Marvin and Tino, who are about to graduate from Missouri Baptist University with college degrees. Yet it also helps me rejoice with Jerson, who admitted to us a couple of months ago that right now, going into drug rehab is more important and necessary than being a freshman in college.

Thanks to Laje, I remember not to be afraid when our young men go through dark times, because God is still there, pushing them, sometimes almost imperceptibly, back to His glorious light. I will not fear, even though God asks me to walk with our guys through the valley of the shadow of death.

Acting on faith rather than fear is a daily decision—a spiritual habit that is formed over the course of a lifetime. Your continued prayers for all of us who minister here in Honduras will help us to continue to reach out to the lost with courage! Dan Paul, our street outreach coordinator, finds himself encountering unstable and sometimes violent people on the streets on a weekly basis. Even so, he continues to love them and reach out to them. Becca Haver, our director of operations, spends many hours a day dealing with our guys' crises while also connecting with their needy and sometimes unstable families. Roger Figueroa, our Micah House activities coordinator, and Marlon and Nohemi Castellanos, our Leadership House coordinators, keep loving our older participants through thick and thin. Pray for our courageous staff as the apostle Paul prayed for the Colossians: that we may be "strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that we may have great endurance and patience" (Colossians 1: 11).

Last week, one of our supporters, after having spent a week with us in Honduras, wrote this email to us: "I continue to be in awe of how your team's ministry continually takes the broken and makes them whole. Everyone I have encountered since I have returned has heard of God's work in the Micah Project's ministry - yesterday even the car wash guy gave me a hug and in tears expressed his awe at what you guys are doing." Encouragement such as this energizes us and gives us the valor to keep doing what God has called us to do. A deep and heartfelt thanks to all of you who have encouraged us in this way!

Muchas gracias!
Your brother in Christ,
Michael Miller