

# LET THERE BE LIGHT

The Micah Project | Christmas 2023



In September, a seven-year-old boy was kidnapped in downtown Tegucigalpa. “Carlos” (not his real name) is an amazing little kid whom we have known through our street ministry. At the time of his abduction, I was visiting friends and family in St. Louis when I received a frantic message from his street-connected mom. “Michael, Carlos has disappeared, and I can’t find him anywhere. It’s been three hours, and I’ve been all over downtown, but there’s no sign of him,” she texted.

Wendy, Micah’s street ministry coordinator, walked the downtown streets and asked the local community if they had seen Carlos. They all know him because he spends most days with his mom begging in the central plaza of the city. But no one had seen him that day. As the hours dragged on, night began to fall.

I have developed a special connection with Carlos over the years, partly because his uncle grew up at Micah, and Carlos looks exactly like him. Not only that, but they also have the same fun-loving character: both are affectionate, intelligent, and kind, but with enough “grumpy” to remind me that they have more than a little “street” in them.

If you have visited the Micah Project recently, you’ve probably met Carlos. He’s the boy who will demand a piggyback ride or a foot race with you. First, he will define a route around the central plaza, and then, with a huge smile on his face (sans his two front teeth), wait for the countdown to start. Inevitably, he will cheat and cut a corner or two as he races, all the while laughing with total abandon.

In the blink of an eye, however, he can flip a switch and go into street-kid mode. He’ll turn his big brown eyes on you and use his most pitiful voice to say that his baby sister needs diapers, medicine, or food. He will point to her, covered in grime and toddling around the plaza near her mom, and ask, “Won’t you give me fifty lempiras to help my little sister?” He also loves Little



Caesar's pizza, which stands guard on one of the four corners of the central plaza. You'd think that after 24 years of street ministry, I'd be savvier about giving in to a kid who asks me to buy him a pizza. You'd be wrong. I'm a big sucker, especially when it comes to Carlos, and more often than not, he'll be the proud owner of a Hot 'N Ready pepperoni pizza by the time we have finished our ministry downtown.

We have come to know dozens of kids like Carlos. Most of them don't sleep on the streets, but they accompany their moms who survive by begging, selling candy and cigarettes, or, tragically, sometimes selling themselves. While many of these young women have made bad decisions that have forced them to use the streets as their sole means of survival, a number of them were raised on the streets as well. Some of the children we see every week are third-generation street kids, trapped in a generational cycle of poverty without the means to break out.

I actually admire Carlos's mom; she loves her four children, and she does what she can to provide for them. Her longtime boyfriend is in our Micah Works program this year to get job training and other life skills so that he and his family can step away from the streets permanently.



The day that Carlos disappeared seemed eternal. I texted his mom several times for an update. Finally, at 8:49 p.m., she notified me that he had been found. The kidnapper had been arrested, and Carlos' mother was at the police intake center to get her son back. I shed tears of relief.

Several weeks later, Carlos dragged his mom to Micah so that he could talk to me. Sitting in the rocking chair on my front porch, he told me how he had been kidnapped. He was matter of fact about the horrific details, making him sound much older than his seven years.

He had been downtown by himself that day, and a woman approached him and offered to buy him a pair of shoes. He figured she would take him to one of the many shoe stores within walking distance; instead, she took him to a car and tried to force him inside. Although he resisted, she hit him in the face and then covered his nose with a rag, which made him fall asleep. He didn't know how long he was out, but when he woke up, they were near Tegucigalpa's public hospital. As the car passed a group of police officers, he banged on the window and shouted for help. The police pulled the car over and after hearing his story, arrested the kidnapper and took them both to the station.





When Carlos wrapped up his story, I told him how sorry I was about what he had been through and that I hoped it would never happen again. But I had another message for him as well.

“Do you remember what I told you when you rode a bus to Micah by yourself a few weeks ago?”

“Yeah, you said I shouldn’t do that.”

“Why did I say that?”

“Because I’m only seven.”

“Why else?”

“Because there are bad people out there who might want to do bad things to me.”

“That’s right. Can you repeat that?” Sheepishly, he repeated the warning. As I hugged him, he asked: “Can we go bounce on the trampoline?”

I suppose all parents and caregivers have the “stranger danger” talk with their children. With the kids who spend so much of their childhood on the streets, though, it’s not hypothetical. It’s crucial that they learn how to protect themselves from evil.

**I wish it didn’t have to be this way.**  
**I wish we could go downtown every week and just do piggyback rides and coloring books and not worry about how vulnerable street kids really are.**

Those of us who minister with the Micah Project love what we do. We are prepared to fight for these children no matter what evil stands in the way: Trauma? Neglect? Addiction? Grinding poverty? Broken families? Evil strangers? These are their enemies, and we will confront them with all the resources that we have at our disposal.

But sometimes in the deep watches of the night, we feel overwhelmed by the darkness that threatens to devour them. This full-of-potential seven-year-old shouldn’t have to survive by begging. And he shouldn’t have to learn how to avoid the bad people or be exposed to evil.

**We desperately want the brokenness to end, and we wonder, “When will we finally be done with evil?”**

Christmas answers that question. Thanks to the baby in the manger, “the people walking in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2), one that shines in all of the broken street corners as far as the curse is found. Every year, we celebrate our newborn Savior by remembering the angels’ song, the shepherds’ awe, and the wise men’s gifts. But we look beyond as well. We look to the cross, to the empty grave, and to the inbreaking Kingdom of our Christ. Isaiah prophesied that this child in the manger would become our “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting

Father, [our] Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6b). One day, Christ will rule over an everlasting kingdom in which children will no longer be “doomed to misfortune” (Isaiah 65:23).

Christmas in Honduras is a raucous celebration of this beautiful truth. There is no “silent night” here! Midnight on Christmas Eve, we will go from house to house and greet our neighbors with a hug. We will have loud music all night long and lots (lots!) of incandescent, thundering fireworks. Our boys will dress up in their new clothes and enjoy the chaotic buzz of Christmas in Honduras.

And yet, we know that our joy is incomplete. We pray “Thy kingdom come” because now it is here only in part. For many of our boys, past scars hurt acutely on holidays that are supposed to be festive. Even in the midst of loud Christmas celebrations, we will shed tears together.

The Micah Project walks with our boys through the “sufferings of this present time” while pointing them to “the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). Beyond this present darkness, hope waits, and a big part of our job is to help our kids find their way to that hope. “Someday, it’s going to be better,” we tell them. “In the meantime, come what may, we’re here for you.”

We will continue to fight for that inbreaking glory in the here-and-now. For 24 years, the Micah Project has had the tremendous privilege of carrying His light into the very streets where darkness reigns. In January, as we enter our 25th year, we have bold plans to shine even brighter: deeper discipleship, more intensive training programs, more intentional ways for our boys and young men to step into independent adulthood.

We are also praying about ways to be a more transformative presence in the lives of the young women and their children who struggle to survive on Tegucigalpa’s downtown streets. We want to dream God’s dreams for Carlos and for those like him who have so much potential but no way to develop it. We want our Savior’s light to shine brightly in these precious lives.

Thank you for your love, prayers, visits, words of encouragement, and financial support. Thank you for being light bearers in Honduras! We have much to do in the year to come, and we are so grateful that you are willing to join us on this beautiful, exciting journey.

Wishing you the fulness of His inbreaking light this Christmas season,

*Michael S. Hill*



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