

# Axel should not be on the streets right now...

Axel should not be on the streets right now. He should not be sleeping in a stall in the outdoor market that sells shoes by the putrid river that runs through Tegucigalpa. He shouldn't be crossing the bridge every day at lunch to beg food from the lunchtime crowd downtown. He should not be running with dangerous people, who make their living by the gun that they hide in their clothes. He should not be back on the streets.

He shouldn't, but he is.

Many of you have met Axel and have fallen in love with him since he joined the Micah Project in September of 2008. The Axel that you know is a lanky, goofy kid who is always quick with a joke or a prank. His chosen method of showing affection toward someone is through an insult... "Hey Michael, why are you so ugly today?" ...always delivered with a lopsided grin and an awkward hug from someone whose 14-year-old body is growing too quickly for him to get a handle on it. The Axel that you meet on a trip to Tegucigalpa is a funny, charming, easy-going young boy.



But that's not all there is to Axel. The reasons why he is back on the streets after two good years speak to a traumatized, angry soul. Earlier this summer, a psychologist from the juvenile prison came to visit the Micah Project. He recognized Axel and they spent some time chatting on the patio of the Micah House. Afterwards, the psychologist expressed shock as he spoke to me about Axel. This well-spoken young man was one of the most violent kids they had in juvenile detention. He couldn't believe it was the same boy. We got the same response when we talked to another street kid organization that he had lived in: they would no longer accept him into their program because of his violent tendencies.

That is not the Axel that we know! We know a loving, caring Axel who has a great thirst for justice and is always looking for ways to help the downtrodden. But wait...the reality is that both of these boys are the same Axel. The Apostle Paul says in Romans: "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." (Romans 7: 21-23). Axel's childhood was full of incredible, degraded evil, more evil than a young child should ever have to bear. His dad is in prison for gang-related violence, and Axel himself was a part of that violence while living on the streets.



Why is Axel back on the streets? That is a question that many people have asked me in the last month. The answer is complex. It could be the drugs that dig their pleasure-inducing claws into these young boys' addicted brains and just won't let go. It could be the hormones raging through his 14-year-old body, calling him back to the danger and excitement of street life, so much more interesting than his second grade classes at Micah. It could be the incredibly complex relationship he has with his mom and dad: hating them for what he had to live through as a child but loving them with a desperate love because...well, because they are his parents, after all. It could be spiritual warfare, with Satan redoubling his efforts to drag this child of God back into the slimy pit.

Every day that our boys are at Micah is a miracle. Choosing life is so much harder than accepting the alternative. It is so easy to slip back into the things of our past. Choosing the Micah Project is hard work for a street boy...they have to go to class, obey rules and continually delay the gratification that came so easily to them on the streets every time they inhaled a puff of yellow glue. Indeed, how crazy it is to ask a street

boy to shut down those pleasure centers and to keep delaying gratification for ten years or so until they can graduate from high school! Moving forward in life is hard, hard work: it is so much easier on the streets to just get through the day.

But over and over again, boys come off the streets into the Micah House and make the choice to begin a new life. Their reasons why are diverse. Micah has an incredible staff that has made a commitment to be family for these boys, showing them what it means to be loved unconditionally. We disciple them daily, teaching them about a God who loves them and wants to save them from sin and death. We have an incredibly dedicated group of supporters that helps us provide for their needs on a daily basis, so that they lack nothing. We even make the effort to help their families, which is so important to them, even the ones that have a complicated relationship with their parents. We help them prepare for the future, providing all of the education and training necessary for them to become successful adults.

Even so, every day comes down to a choice between life and death. And not one of our incredibly dedicated staff members can make that choice for our boys. Each and every one of them has a daily choice to make. And, as we all know, sometimes it is easier, more fun and more exciting to choose old habits that lead to death.

So...Axel should not be on the streets today, but he is. He has left the Micah House twice in the last month. The longer he stays on the streets, the more he becomes like the old Axel: unable to control the anger that is just below the surface. Last week, when he came back to the house for a few days after three weeks on the streets, was very, very difficult. The happy, joking, goofy kid had been replaced by a rebellious, on-edge youth that always seemed ready to blow. And, since Monday, he is back on the streets.



All of our dedication, love and hope cannot save Axel. Why? Because no human being is capable of saving another human being. We'd love to have a magic formula to be able to automatically remove the street from our boys. Because we don't, we cry (to paraphrase Paul), "Who will rescue them from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). Thankfully, Paul answers his own wrenching cry: "Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

And that is what it all boils down to. We can provide the best environment, with the best structure and the best people at the Micah Project, but none of that will save our boys. Only God saves. We strive for best practice day-to-day, but only God saves. We are getting ready to buy new land to provide a better environment for our boys in the years to come, but that will not save them either.

Only God saves.

That is a terrifying, but incredibly joyous truth. And it is a truth that we claim for Axel. Over the past few weeks, I spent many hours in the market district looking for Axel, and as I walked through that dangerous, impoverished section of this city I continually prayed, "Lord show your mighty hand in this young boy's life."

Will you join us in praying this prayer for Axel in the days to come? Not only for Axel, but for Hector, David, Miguel Angel, and Axelito...all of whom have to make a daily choice to leave the addiction of street life behind them. Your prayers are powerful and effective in their lives.



Over the last ten years, God has shown His mighty hand through the Micah Project in some miraculous ways. We are convinced that those miracles have as much to do with your prayers as with our daily actions in their lives. So... please continue to pray and to enlist other prayer warriors on behalf of these boys!

Su hermano en Cristo, *Michael Miller*