

Muddy Shoes & Marvelous Middles

The Micah Project
Christmas 2014

Stand firm, and you will win life.

- Luke 21:19

I hear footsteps on the gravel path that winds from the Micah House to the staff cabins that perch on a hillside on the back of our property. Crunch, crunch, crunch... they grow louder and drown out the chorus of crickets that begins to chirp its hymn to the heavens as soon as the sun disappears behind the distant mountains. Five pairs of muddy cleats pound up the stairs of my wooden abode and onto my front porch. The pastoral calm that usually settles over my cabin after dark is replaced by the happy, lively chatter of five young men. It is Wednesday evening; it must be time for Bible study!

Wednesday is always a long one for the Micah boys. They are up at 6:30 for chores, followed by a quick breakfast and morning devotionals an hour later. At 8am sharp, our big, iron bell rings letting the boys know that it is time for classes in our home-schooling program. After several hours of reading, writing and arithmetic, the boys swap their school uniforms for soccer garb and head into town to the public soccer league where they have played for many years. They run, jump, perform ball-handling drills, and run some more for several sweaty hours. When their practice winds down at 5pm, they head back to Micah 2.0, get a quick dinner, and head over to my cabin for Bible study.

I open my cabin door (making sure the guys take their cleats off before entering!), and the guys roll in and take their customary positions in my living room. This is our middle group of boys: fifteen-through-seventeen year-olds that have as much Micah life ahead of them as they have behind. They are in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades, having lost several years of schooling while living on the streets; most of them will be in their twenties by the time they graduate from high school.



Axel takes the ball at soccer practice



The Micah "middles" gather in Michael's cabin for Wednesday evening Bible Study

For the entire year, our Wednesday evening study has been an ongoing conversation about the fatherhood of God—about a Father who knows every intimate detail of their lives, loves them fiercely and wants them to grow up to be just like him. A truth that these young men have come to know in their heads, but have needed some time to process in their hearts.

"Loving father" is not an easy idea for them to wrap their hearts around. Two of them, brothers, have a father who has been incarcerated for many years. Another two have dads that have died (one in early childhood and one only a couple of years ago) and the fifth has a father who lives in Tegucigalpa but has little interest or investment in his son's life.

"So guys, tell me all that you know about what it means to be a good father"

But that is the amazing thing about this middle group of guys in the middle of their studies at Micah as they study God's word together in the middle of the week. Despite all evidence to the contrary in their own tragic experience, they are coming to understand that if you "draw near to God, He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). They have come to feel safe enough here among their Micah family to share some of the terrible circumstances of their past lives. And while there have been some tears as they have worked through these things, over and over again I find myself amazed at their incredible courage to keep hope alive. They should be bitter and angry at what they have suffered; they were much too young to deal with the evil that life threw at them. But right down the line, each one of these young men has opened their hearts to their real Father's love.

Wow. I may be the teacher of this Wednesday night Bible study, but it is these guys that are educating me. About faith. About our Father's love. About moving forward even if you're still in the middle of a long, hard journey and the end seems impossibly far away.



As humans, we love to celebrate beginnings. Births, weddings, inaugurations – everything is so sparkingly new! Standing at the starting line, everything going forward is pure hope. I suspect that is one of the reasons we love Christmas so much. A newborn baby, announced by a host of angels, breaking into time to usher in God's kingdom and salvation!! The joy of this new beginning overflows in our hearts and reminds us to wait in great expectation for what is to come.

At Micah, our biggest celebrations usually revolve around miraculous beginnings as well. Victor's first day as a Micah boy! Noé starts taking first grade classes after years on the streets! These are moments when we so clearly see the power of God's salvation to rescue the lost and perishing. In a way, they too are like a new birth, watching the true person come out from behind the years of addiction and the degradation of street life.

But, day-to-day, the times I cherish the most are the marvelous middles. By my count, 1,730 days have passed since Axel left the streets and joined the Micah Project. He has almost as many days ahead of him before he will graduate from high school. In this middle time, every single day is an opportunity to encourage him in his walk with the Lord, to inspire him to discover his vision for the future, and to gently nudge him forward. A chance to teach him to "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love." (1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

There is nothing mundane about the middle. After hugging each one of these five young men after our Wednesday Bible study, sending them back over to the Micah House to finish their homework before bedtime, I praise the Lord for using these hours in the middle of the week to fortify and renew their hope; to keep their eyes pointed forward.

In a way, Micah 2.0 is entering that middle season too. We have lived in the new house for over a year now. While it looked stunningly beautiful on its inauguration day last year, it now has more of a lived-in feel (alas, those same muddy cleats!). I think our entire staff would agree that the Lord didn't give us this amazing facility just to enjoy its beauty. He gave it to us to USE!



Michael gives Victor a hug on his first day as a Micah boy back in January

And every single day, it gets used to the hilt! Take a look at some of the activities that happen during an average week:

- Twenty to thirty teenage boys from the surrounding communities come through our gates daily to play soccer and participate in other activities with our boys.
- A group of teenage girls from the neighboring Villa Linda Miller community comes a couple times a week for a Bible study with our new missionary Kelsey Cratty.
- Volunteers from Villa Linda Miller bring over a few senior citizens two afternoons a week to sit on our front porch, sip coffee and share their stories with the Micah boys.
- A busload of the boys' families pulls into the property twice a month for family visits.
- Our technical school is a constant buzz of activities and always has five or six welding or carpentry projects going on at any given time.
- Our older guys from the Timothy House come out frequently to catch up with their younger Micah brothers.
- A group of volunteers that are helping our street minister Stephen Kusmer start a new project with older street kids at the old Micah House are on the property almost daily, planning the new program with Stephen.

Kelsey climbs the water tower with some of her Bible study girls



Hector celebrates his 18th birthday surrounded by his Micah Family



Every day, even on the normal days, the Lord's name is being lifted high in a thousand different ways, in a hundred different hearts. It is a beautiful sight to behold. Even if it does come with tracked up floors and muddy shoes!

Many of you have celebrated a lot of beginnings with us here at the Micah Project. What is so special to us, though, is how you have persevered during the middle times. It may take ten years or more for us to know how each boys' story will unfold, but you have continued to sustain each one with your prayers and support, knowing that He who is able to keep them from falling is teaching them to stand firm.

At the end of this year, two new missionaries, Jessica Briant and Kelsey Cratty, have joined our team. In January, John and Becca Bell will move back to Honduras with their children Nico and Emmy after a two-year study leave in Denver. Surely, the reason why the Lord is assembling such a powerful team at the Micah Project in 2015 is because he has powerful ministry in store for us! And our commitment to you, as you participate in this ministry with us through your time, talent and finances, is that we will prayerfully use your resources in the most effective way possible—with the end goal of bringing HIM glory in all of these lives!

Thank you for standing with us in the hopeful beginnings and the marvelous middles in the lives of these young men! While the celebratory endings may be a long way off, with your help, each of them will be able to claim as true the words of our Lord: "stand firm, and you will win life." (Luke 21:19)

Muchas gracias!

Michael Miller

Feliz Navidad
from all of us at the
Micah Project



Micah 2.0 will continue to develop in 2015 and beyond!
Here is a list of future projects:

1. Build a visitors' cabin (so that you can come and stay with us!)
2. Develop our athletic facilities (such a great tool for ministry and outreach!)
3. Pave our entrance road (fewer muddy shoes!!!)
4. Build our technical school/education center
(another way to provide hope to more youth!)
5. Remodel the old Micah House for our new program for older street youth
(a population that desperately needs a place to find hope!)

www.micahprojecthonduras.org

