

MisSion CriTikal

#15 – The Four of Three

“Better than blackboards!” might be the statement of some teachers. But the ongoing statement of the tent mission teens always prevailed – “Do the best with what ya got!” More accurately though, would be “Do your best with what God gave you!”

That's the reason for the branches Lyla stuck in the ground at the front of the Story Spot near the tent; the tent that was becoming more of a worship center; a church, each week. The four branches in the Story Spot, each had three twigs to hang things on. This quartet of branches would soon be the focus of joy and laughter in the hearts of children so often filled with much sadness.

Teenager Lyla lived with her Mama and Willy – her 8 yr old brother, in one of the sheet metal shacks in the village at the bottom of the hill. She knew all the children that excitedly filled, and sometimes overflowed, the boxed in area known as the Story Spot, each Sunday afternoon.

The story times all started much the same way each week. The children, and a couple village teens, all sat on the ground quietly facing Lyla. She spoke, “Here we go. ONE – TWO – THREE!” Then in unison all the children shouted, “THANK YOU JESUS!” They all applauded, looking into the clouds. You could be sure Heaven heard, 'cuz many of the village mothers, heard the children's opening chorus and applause. Lyla can show you some of the sweetest choirs don't bother about sopranos, altos, and such. The melodies of the children often reach the farthest and most needy audiences too.

For the benefit of the very young children in the Story Spot chorus, Lyla had the children count the three twigs one each of the four branches, stuck in the ground. With more gusto than soldiers responding to a tough Army drill sergeant, the children counted the twelve twigs, out loud. That drill sergeant would have been proud of the unity of the children, all counting with Lyla.

The Story Spot lesson began. The teenage teacher hung a ragged piece of cardboard on the top twig of the first branch. It showed the word JESUS. The second twig held the word LOVES. The third twig on the first branch held the word ME. With all eyes

watching every move Lyla made, she touched the cardboard JESUS and told the children that when they felt afraid or sad, remember that Jesus is watching and will hug them better than any grown up could. And to prove that Jesus cares about boys and girls, He left Heaven for a while and was born in the manger, so He would soon show the whole world He cares and protects.

Lyla then touched the LOVES cardboard and explained about the love that Jesus has for each of us – even when we do things that don't please Him.

The ME sign was removed from the branch and one at a time, held against the chest of each child, by Lyla. It was just a small but effective way for the children to see themselves on that bottom twig of the first branch – ME. There was never a better medicine for the heart of man, those three little words, JESUS LOVES ME.

The lesson continued with the three words on the next branch. THIS – I – KNOW. Lyla spoke about each of those three words. And then continued with the three words on the third branch, FOR – THE – BIBLE. Lyla passed the cardboard BIBLE sign around to each child, with the promise they'd be learning more about what a Bible is, next Sunday.

The final three word signs, TELLS – ME – SO, were explained to the Story Spot children. Lyla then took all the word signs off their twigs, mixed them up, and put them in a pile in the center of the children. She then asked for twelve volunteers to help. “What we're about to do, children, is super important. We want to be loving and do our best as we tell others about Jesus and His Bible. I need each of you volunteers, one at a time, to pick the top sign and hang it on the twig it's supposed to be on.”

The smartest man in the world, with words, couldn't describe the joy in Lyla's heart as she watched that little army of children carefully hanging their word sign where it went.

Little Toby's shoulder was hurting big time, but he asked if he could close in prayer. “Dear Jesus, thank you for loving me in the Bible, and changing me from being a throw-away kid. Amen.”