

MisSion CriTikal – Teens, Tents, 'n Truth

#1 Door Slammin'

“It can't be done! There's no way. We got nothin' to start with. People will think we're looney!” Lenny said out loud, for the umpteenth time. The two teen boys sat at the top of a grassy knoll just outside Kustin village, looking at all the small shacks filled with broken dreams and discouraged people. It was a real struggle for Daanum to fight back the tears, that wanted to erupt to the open sky, asking God the why, the how, the who, the when, and why us.

The reason for Daanum's tears was the village kids. No the kids weren't mean malicious or anything like that. You'd understand Daanum's tears if you just once looked close-up into the eyes of any one of the village kids. It was like you were seeing two black holes of nothingness, just like in outer space. No doubt, you'd see the same nothingness in the eyes of their parents too.

He started it all; last July – that evangelist was the one that opened his Bible and shared the news of an open door; that's open to everyone. Lenny and Daanum sat there on the bench and could hardly believe their ears. When the song started, Daanum almost stumbled over Lenny's feet as he quickly walked to the altar rail before the song stopped and the door slammed shut – maybe forever.

Neither teens were very good with learning and memorizing school stuff, somehow that didn't matter for right now. Several times Daanum - (“Daa” was what Lenny most often called his school friend.) patiently explained to Lenny that hope and love soaked in truth have to come before quadratic equations, legal letters, and chemical concoctions.

Last September Lenny was totally hooked on Daa's attitude that never seemed to even hint of nothingness. A couple times he heard Daa include his name in prayer of thanks for God's goodness.

It was on this very spot, they were now sitting, that Daa's invitation to Lenny to trust Christ to be his personal Savior and Lord of his life. Over the last few months, Lenny had finally ran out of “No”s, and said “Yes – definitely – yes” to Daa and to Jesus Christ.

I won't say that fireworks and rockets went off or bells or sirens screamed, but it was just like a super heavy backpack was taken off Lenny's shoulders. From that day until this, the two teens talked about how they could show other kids about the door that leads to lifted burdens and black hole attitudes blasted away by God's power.

It would be good to know some about Lenny. He was a year younger than Daa. One thing that would stand out in bold letters on Lenny's resume – if he ever wrote one, is that he could probably build a rocket ship with a pair of pliers and a day spent in a sizable junk yard.

So, as the boys watched the children chasing each other around the shacks and a few adults watching them, those questions came back and tried to take root – like thorn bushes: who, how, where, which, when, and what first.

That was probably the best question to tackle first -What's First? Where do we begin?

Is that your question? Where is my “START HERE”?

Keep reading to find out...

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#2 In The Beginning

It didn't seem right, somehow. No it wasn't a secret or something sneaky or anything like that. Daanum just felt in his heart it was a mission – a project he and his teen friend Lenny were called by God to do. They didn't say anything to others about it. And that was part of the rub. Neither of the two teens felt they had any skills, tools, or anything that would make them Heaven's choices for the heart-for-service they both shared. What's even worse is they didn't even know where to start. All they had was the always-present burning inside to teach the villagers what little they knew about God. Lenny would often call it Heaven's Burden Blastin'!

“I CAN'T STAND IT, ANYMORE!” Daa shouted at the trees and the grass, after spending the better part of several afternoons with Lenny at the spot – Their Spot, on the hill above the village. The shout really startled Lenny so much he had thoughts of shielding himself behind a tree to see what Daa was going to do next. “Lenny, I'm done dreamin'. Ain't no angel gonna drop down here and give us two the plans for what to do first.” Daa stood to his feet, brushed off his ripped trousers and began clearing the brush and branches from the spot – Their Spot, the spot Lenny invited Christ in. To both boys it just seemed to be a breath of fresh air to the brain, to be on the move, still not knowing exactly what's next.

It wasn't until a month or so later that Daa and Lenny heard their preacher use the “Start Here” Bible verses in Matthew 6 that instructs, *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.”* (33, 34a).

With his hands on his hips, Lenny watched his partner take a few small branches with the twigs removed, and push them in the ground, so there was plenty sticking up and easy to see. Next more branches were laid flat on the ground making a line between the stakes. Lenny excitedly helped strip more branches and handing

them to Daa. The two boys, more than once would straighten the line of branches to make them as in-line as they could. It became an unspoken attitude that would become the very foundation of all the things they did: Do The Best With Whatcha Got!!

Lenny got a case of the flu and stayed close to his bedroom (and bathroom) for the next two weeks. That left Daanum to carry on the efforts at The Spot by himself. It was all for good reason. Those two weeks without Lenny taught Daa another lesson about God's ways. Sometimes sickness has a real way of molding a person... or maybe more. There wasn't a second's doubt in Daa, that Lenny wasn't taking time EVERY day to pray for the efforts being done at The Spot. Even in that, Daa's heart felt warmed that others were praying for God-honoring efforts – sometimes being done alone.

The line of branches between the four stakes formed a box on the ground. It sort of put you in mind of a log cabin being built – only with branches. During the afternoons of Lenny's illness, Daa began clearing the tall grass from inside the box, but leaving the sod undisturbed. But during the grass trimming outside the box, Daa would often lay his fingers on the line of branches and ask God to help with the heart-burdens and efforts, so humble as they were.

One afternoon, Daa was still working on trimming the tall grass just outside the box and praying as he went, that he heard a voice that startled him. It was a girl's voice, “Whatcha doin?” He quickly turned around to see who spoke. It was a girl probably about his age and a younger boy with her. Daa tried to see her face but the bright sun was directly behind her head shining through her hair. It was an odd thought, but Daa first imagined she was an angel. Then reality took hold of his thoughts as he cleared his throat and tried to speak.

What has God got planned?

We'll learn about the teen's angel visit next time.

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#3 Teen Angel Visit

“This isn't supposed to happen! I never planned this! Why would anyone notice what me and my teen buddy, Lenny are doing on this grassy knoll, above the village?” That's another lesson the two teen boys would always remember – God knows – God cares about big things like planets and He knows and cares about little things... and people. A powerful outdoors explanation of God's caring attention is in Luke 12 *“Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”* (6, 7)

Speaking about hair, is that angel person that asked Daa, “Whatcha doin?” He quickly rose to his feet, brushing off the knees of his pants, now able to see the face of the mysterious girl. With an unsteady tone in his voice, he said, “Oh. Hi. I'm working on our mission – our mission station.” Hearing his own words 'mission station' seemed to add a bit of authenticity to their efforts. The angel girl looked around and didn't see anyone else except Daa and her 8 year old brother. “Whatchew mean OUR? I don't see any one else around here except you, me, and Willy.”

Daa still tried to sound official – sort of military-like, as he explained about his partner Lenny, being sick and all. Willy slowly walked around the box of branches, careful not to step on them, as Lyla told her name to Daa. Daa did the same.

Lyla asked, “So why ya doin this? What's the mission of your mission?”, she said with a hint of a smile under all her curly unkept hair. “Are you fixin' to spy on our village and rob us, or something mean?” Daa and Lyla both sat on the cool grass in a way they could keep an eye on Willy, still slowly walking around the box. “Daa, you and Lenny are all bad wrong, if you're thinking of robbing us. We all poor as an orphan polecat,” she said, gentering toward the village.

Lyla held a clean piece of grass between her lips as Daa laid back on the grass and watched the cotton candy clouds inch across the deep blue sky. You could tell his eyes weren't seeing the clouds,

but that afternoon that Lenny asked Jesus to be his savior. His explanation of that day carried more warmth than the afternoon sun. He explained the event, as simply as he could to Lyla.

Her expression told you without words, she didn't really understand all that Daanum was telling her. After a few moments she spoke loudly, “Willy! Come on, I gotta get you home before mama thinks a bear got us both.” She looked real serious at Daa and said, “See that shack on the end, with the big piece of blue metal on the roof? Well, that's where me, mama, Willy, and two dogs live. If me and Willy come back tomorrow afternoon, I want you to tell me simple-like, why this powerful loving God of yours won't give us a house, enough food and milk so Willy and I don't have to share a glass. And I wanna know why your God let my daddy just up and leave us for good? Did me and Willy do something wrong or is it that He just don't like poor folks?”

“Come on, Willy! We gotta go! But we'll try to come back tomorrow.” The brother and big sister started walking down the gentle slope to their sheet metal shack, they call home.

Almost till the sun finally set, Daa sat indian fashion staring at the grass in front of him. He tried over and over to put a simple explanation together to answer the angel girl's aching questions that bordered on self guilt.

Before heading for home, he walked slowly around the mission box of branches asking God to teach him about Heaven's love – so much greater than the love of humans.

In truth, God had sent an angel... a teen angel called Lyla. She didn't come with blueprints and plans, but with questions about God's love, provision, and her own spiritual condition. You and I may not think the events at The Spot are all that great – but God does. He calls it The Great Commission. Guarantees included! (Matthew 28:18+)

Would you like to be a part of something that is truly great?
Now you know how to start.

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#4 Lyla's Sky Promise

This is going to be tricky... Daanum wasn't sure how he could explain much about God to another teen without using Bible verses and such. He read between the lines, so-to-speak, that Lyla didn't read hardly at all. So holding a Bible with its precious unerring words in front of her wouldn't work very well.

Near the mission spot and the boxed in area, Daa laid on the ground watching those slow moving clouds, as he so often did. As though God was just on the other side of that big cloud over there, Daa began asking upward, how he could share that Gospel message of Salvation to someone that can't read, but wants to know more about Heaven's eternal provisions.

Not so much like it was a bolt of lightning or something loud or flashy, the answer came to him – it was one of God's countless promises to humans, the real angels have no appreciation for. Daa rubbed his nose to hold back a thank you tear.

The afternoon's sun was still a real toaster and found Daa sitting on the ground in the shade of a large tree filled with lazy waving leaves.

As promised, Lyla and her younger brother reached the mission spot, but didn't see Daa. She announced loudly, “Hey! We're here. But where are ya?” “Over here in the shade!” was the reply. As Lyla walked slowly to the shade, Daa remembered that when he first saw Lyla, he thought she must be an angel; a teen angel.

It wasn't real obvious at first, but as the two teens in the shade were discussing the weather and such, Willy began gathering branches and stripping off the lesser twigs and leaves. Almost as though he were building a skyscraper foundation, he laid his branches on top of those already aligned between the corner stakes of the new mission.

Looking at her, Daa began, “Lyla. Ya remember the questions ya asked me yesterday, about God? Ya asked how come he has some people living in fancy houses and why He has some people living in sheet metal shacks?” He continued, “Lyla. There's a

lot of God's gifts to us our eyes can't see – but there's also a lot we can see. See?”

“We can't really judge how much God loves us, just by what we see and hear.” The teen boy changed his seated position to better face the teen angel with the questions that no real angel could ask. He spoke on, “Ya seen a rainbow, right? Well that's a powerful gift to all humans – individually. Besides being lovely to look at, after a rain, it's actually a promise from Heaven, to me and to you, Lyla.”

“Way back in Bible times the people all acted so terrible toward God and each other, God got fed up with it. We'll call their rotten actions and attitudes SIN. Well, God decided He was going to wipe all the sin and sinners off the earth. That's when He had Noah build a boat – the ark, to save all the animals and just 8 people. So after the flood, God promised He'd never do that destruction again, and He put the rainbow in the sky as a promise to me and to you.”

Daa continued, “Now remember I said Noah put the animals on the ark? Some of those animals were saved to make babies after the flood was over. But some of those animals had a very special purpose. They were to be sacrifices to God. That means they were killed and their blood was sprinkled on an altar, according to God's plan. The shedding of their blood was applied to the sins of Noah and his family aboard the ark.”

“Lyla. Better than the rainbow promise, the best gift God has given to us, we can't see with our eyes either. It's the sacrifice for your sins and mine – but not an animal sacrifice. It was the sacrifice of His own sinless Son – Jesus Christ.”

The teen to teen salvation lesson was interrupted by Willy calling them to come see the work he had done on the mission box. It was like he was taking part ownership in the mission project by his working on it.

Isn't it interesting that missions even has a place for 8 year olds that want to be part of something important happening – whether it's skyscrapers or sky promises of love and provision?

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MisSion CriTikal

#5 - The Torn Treasure

'Like a mama skunk saving empty perfume bottles.'
ummmm... We'd better back up and explain things.

Daanum noticed the kitchen curtains moved by the warm noontime breeze, as he finished his potato soup and milk. He was on his way to the sink with his dishes when his mom entered the kitchen with, "Daa. Thomas is at the front door and wants to speak with you pronto." "OK mom." If he knew what was coming, he might not have went to the door, as you'll soon see.

"Hi Tom, what's up?" "Well first off, my brother Lenny is pretty much over his flu. Second, he's over at the dump and he needs you over there right away." Now Lenny is a scavenger of the first order. Most often when he's on a prospecting trip, he has about as much of a positive outcome as a mama skunk collecting empty perfume bottles. But he means well and he has an unquestioned burden for missions, but still...

Daa told his mom where he was going as he headed for the back door and onto his bike with its squeaky chain. Peddling to the dump, he tried to think of all the events he wanted to tell Lenny that had happened at the mission during the last two weeks. Especially Lyla the teen angel and other things.

Daa coasted through the gate and instantly saw Lenny dragging something large out of the scrap piles. At first glance it looked like some kind of tarp. It really deserved to be put on a bonfire and reduced to ashes, but still...

The squeaky chain bike was parked and Daa walked over to Lenny, just sure he should immediately close his eyes, turn around and forget what he just saw. "Look at this, Daa. Isn't she a beauty? I'm sure this is the best find I've made this year. Boy can we make good use of this at the mission spot!" Oh sure. God has given us all different personalities, but when He wired Lenny, He must have put the words trash and testimony on the same page in his head.

Lenny pulled more pieces of the torn tarp out and spread each piece out. By jingo, it wasn't just a tarp, IT WAS A TENT! The biggest piece was the pointed roof and the other long pieces were the wall pieces. Lenny was lit up like the afterburner of a fighter jet

being launched from an aircraft carrier. God had given Lenny a wonderful gift of vision. Lenny could look past the paint, the polish, the rust, the rips, and the dirt to see a treasure to be a tool in reaching out to others with the Gospel.

While the two teens were spreading out the tent for inspection, Thomas had headed home and brought back the stout wagon tied with a rope to his bike seat. It took Tommy three trips, but the tent was now in Lenny's back yard.

A bucket of soapy water, a broom, and the water hose cleaned up the tent enough to see several rips and holes that would somehow need to be fixed. Lenny excitedly believed an angel had led him to the tent with such assurance, you'd never convince him otherwise. When Mrs. Patton (that's Lenny's mom) looked out the back window, she saw the three boys on their knees at the edge of the tent. At first she thought they were inspecting the damage, but then realized that wasn't what they were doing at all. They were praying. They were praying thankful prayers for the tent, but when it was Daanum's turn to pray, it all changed.

Daa could visualize the people that would be coming to the tent mission and learning about the wonderful treasures of truth God has already given them. He could see the tent filled with eager minds and hearts learning about the rainbow promise and the sin that dishonors God and His sacrificed Son – Jesus Christ.

The boys could already see how wonderfully God was providing for their needs – but in ways more than they could imagine. Fully assembled the tent would be about 10 feet by 10 feet that a 6 foot person could easily stand up in.

And with Lyla their teen angel, of sorts was already beginning to learn from the mission on The Spot. The things they were learning were critical things that set your heart at peace and your eyes toward God's purpose for you.

They decided to call the tent ministry MisSion CriTikal. Their mission is critical and so is yours if you're sharing the Gospel that changes lives for an eternity.

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MisSion CriTikal

#6 – The Ten Foot Python

“WHEW! This is going to be a job! Lenny, this going to be tough getting this tent up to our MisSion CriTikal spot above the village,” stated Daanum. Lenny's next sort-of startled Daa (pronounced “Day”) when he said, “I know what. Let's pretend. Let's pretend this is like a relay race. You know, one guy starts running for a while, then he hands the stick to the next person that runs. I think it would be fun to have a relay with God.”

Daa began to think Lenny was coming up with another one of his weird mama skunk ideas, but he decided to listen anyhow. “OK Lenny, what's your idea?... (He struggled to not include the word 'weird'.) “Well, Daa. It's sort-of like our 'do the best with whatcha got' rule, only we include God. See, we'll use the wagon to get the pieces of the tent over to the bottom of the hill. Then we'll turn the tent over to God and let Him get it up the hill. Is that cool or what? If God wants the tent up the hill, maybe he'll send us a strong angel.” Daa had no reply for that. So that would be their plan. And just maybe, it was also God's plan.

That August afternoon seemed like the hottest day of the year, but that didn't matter. The missionary-at-heart fire that both boys had within them burned much hotter.

As best as they could, the tent pieces were folded up to fit on that wagon tied to the back of the bicycle. The four pieces, in turn, finally made it to the bottom of the hill and were unloaded. By the time the last piece was delivered, 8 year old Willy was there sitting on one of the folded tent pieces already delivered.

Willy spoke up as the teens unloaded the last tent section, “Lyla, my big sister sent me on ahead 'cus she's bringing a surprise.” Looking at the heavy tent pieces and the long hill they needed to go up, Daa thought maybe God should send a tough angel to help, but probably the surprise would just be a pet mama skunk.

Before they appeared from behind the bushes, everyone heard Lyla's teenage voice, “C'mon mama! It's ok they're nice people. Walk faster or it'll be dark.” A moment later, Lyla came into view and a lady using a crutch, behind her. Willy spoke to the teen boys, “This is our mama. She's a little shy.”

With everyone gathered around, Lenny explained to everyone about his idea for God's relay, to get the heavy tent up the hill. Mama listened, staring at the tent pieces but didn't ever make eye contact with any of the others. Now was a good time to pray. Daa had everyone bow their heads with eyes closed before he led the prayer.

About half way through the prayer, they heard some sounds like the tent roof piece was being unfolded, but Daa's prayer continued. By the time the Amen was spoken, everyone was looking toward the sounds. It was mama unfolding one of pieces.

Lenny politely motioned to mama the tent is not being set up here. With hand motions he explained it was supposed to be put together, up there. Mama didn't pay any attention and continued unfolding the roof. After that was done, she started rolling up the roof like a sheet of paper to make a tube. Everyone else knelt down and began to help.

Still without saying a word, mama picked one of the roll and put it on her shoulder like a log or something. She waited until everyone else got in line behind her and picked up their part of the roof roll.

When everyone had picked up some of the roof roll, she slowly turned and faced up the hill. It was the funniest thing you ever saw. Mama and young people carrying that roof roll up the hill like they did it every day. Willy tried to carry the back end but would stumble every so often. The curving around small bushes and stones made it look like a big 10 foot python snake going up the hill.

Sometimes our uphill efforts for God don't require a muscle-bustin' angel, but just heartfelt teamwork. No sooner had the last piece made it up the hill in the same slithering way, than mama started back down the hill, still not saying a word.

Lenny raced after her and handed her a small flower. The tender smile he got in return would be precious to him, all the rest of his days.

You do your part and let God do His part... He's waiting for you.

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Mission Critikal

#7 – God's Watchin' – We can prove it!

The slithering pieces of tent made it up to the Mission Critikal spot at the top of the knoll overlooking the little village of tar paper sheet metal shacks. Lyla's mama walked back down to her shack, which left the three teenagers and 8 yr old Willy, still breathing hard and a little damp in the armpits.

The four sat in the shade in something of a circle, facing each other. Daanum (Daa, for short) led the group in a prayer of thanks to God for providing a way to get the tent up the hill – and in a way no one expected. But the prayer also included asking God to use the tent; the Mission Critikal to clearly lovingly show others, young and old, the great promises God has made to those that love Him; those that seemed to have a mountain in front of them.

This doesn't seem to be the case, though logic would say that teens know more and are more keenly aware than any 8 yr old. But not today; not at Mission Critikal. The plan was to unroll the roof piece of the tent, create some poles and stakes, and go from there.

The roof was unrolled, making sure the outside was facing up. It was then, that Willy tapped Lenny on the shoulder and clearly said, “Lenny, God is watching us and I can prove it.” No one would ever expect such a profound statement from an 8 yr old, and Lenny certainly didn't.

“Willy, what did you just say to me?” Willy repeated his statement just a little louder, so that the rest of the team heard it. They each stopped what they were doing and moved closer to Willy to get the details. Looking at each of the team, the 8 yr old repeated the third time, “God is watching us and I can prove it.”

Willy continued with the details. “You can see for yourself. See how the roof piece fits neatly inside the sticks and stakes box? Well, that's the proof.” Daa told Willy he'd have to be more specific than that. The 8 yr old complied. “Look. See how the roof fits nicely inside the stick box? It doesn't lap over or anything like that. The stakes and branches were laid out days before we ever found the tent. When we put the stakes and branches down, the only one

that knew the size of the tent we'd find later is God. He and He only, guided us to lay out the branches in just the right places, so it would all fit. Not only that, but while we were trying to figure out how to get the tent up the hill, God had already prepared mama to come and help, and know God's plan how to get it done.”

The branches that were already lined up, helped provide extra stakes to anchor the tent. God's timing and provision lesson, the tent mission team would be taught over and over, is listed in Isaiah 65:

“And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” (vs 24)

The Mission Critikal group thought of themselves as ones God would find too humble and unimportant to hear and help them. He certainly had more important people and places to bless. But we see the scriptural promise and the evidence of the deep continual watch care and provision, of God; the always ON-TIME God.

How could anything be more comforting and inspiring, than to know – the One Who single-handedly created the plants and the planets, by His own power and authority, hears us, answers us, and is never late.

As the tent was slowly coming together, each of the team was thinking of other examples of God's on-time provisions in their own lives.

No doubt any one of them would ask you and I, “Has God placed proof in your life that shows He hears, He answers, and is never late?” If your answer is no, or 'I don't know', then maybe you've not been letting Him do His part and you just do your part, trusting Him and His promises... Now's the perfect time to start.

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