

MisSion CriTikal

#8 – The Soul Meter – Ya Gotta Have One

It takes tweaking – and lots of it. All the alterations of the tent post lengths and positioning, seemed to never end. The trashed tent that Lenny first thought of as a treasure, must have had a mind of its own. It was like it refused to be anything valuable to others. The three day construction phase of MisSion CriTikal on the grassy hill above the tiny village was more than a challenge.

As the tent slowly went up, Lenny's excitement about his tent treasure was going down hill, and fast. It was like every place he looked at the tent revealed another rip, another place to be mended. His heart kept asking the question, more often each day, 'why was God giving the teen team (plus 8 yr old Willy) such a hard way to go, to share His gospel with lost and needy village people?' If He really wanted to teens to share the Gospel on the hillside, God would send down an angel with a brand new tent with sturdy poles and clear easy directions to put it together. But...

Daanum had been noticing Lenny's sinking spirit and it weighed heavily on his heart. Daa had led Lenny to heaven's eternal salvation in Jesus Christ, on the very spot the tent was being built. Another thing that was noticed, was Willy. Willy seemed to have chosen Lenny as a role model – someone to look up to. The 8 yr old's teen sister, Lyla was watching the attitudes of each of the group and was certainly learning both good and bad.

There were no bright lights or whistles or God speaking in loud directions as Daa's prayers fervently asked for an answer. What is His answer to the declining spirit in the mission, even before the tent was fully constructed. But God answered Daa – in a way no one would have thought of:

EVERYONE NEEDS A SOUL METER!

Have you ever noticed how God sometimes gives you an answer, that might be half an answer? He gives you the seed answer that you must cultivate and develop with His further guidance. The soul meter answer was like that.

Daa thought about how meters measure stuff and tell you if it's good or bad, hot or cold, slow or fast, up or down. At breakfast

the next morning, Daa thought about the soul meter and also the many places the tent required mending, to save Lenny's treasure. More prayer from Daa's heart went heavenward and the soul meter began to take shape. Much of the details would be explained after lunch when everyone got together at the mission.

Lenny was the last one to arrive, just dropping his bike on the ground in a careless manner. Daa announced, "Hey guys! I'd like everyone to gather together for our first meeting under our new mission roof." Everyone except Lenny was light-hearted about this first, as he sat indian fashion in the circle of others around the strong tent posts.

Daa began, "I'd like lead us in prayer as we begin today. Dear Lord, we thank you deeply for leading Lenny to this tent treasure that fits our mission needs so well. Jesus, we easily see all the places the tent needs further work, but we know you love us, the villagers, and all we reach out to. Please dear Lord show us how to use our soul meter to your glory. Amen."

Daa continued, "God has given our mission a soul meter that doesn't require batteries or long directions. It's not a meter you hold in your hand, but in your heart and in mine, each and every day. Now first, I want each of you sitting here to look up. You need to clearly see all the rips and places our lovely tent needs mending. That tent is EXACTLY what God wanted us to have – to make our soul meter work and to see more of His precious love."

"Lots of meters have a 'cold' on one side and a 'hot' on the other, or a minus over here and a plus over there. Well, our soul meter has 'rips' over here and 'souls to be saved and strengthened' over there. Our soul meter measures where our heart is, spiritually."

"Do we let Satan discourage us with the continuing work on God's tent gift to us? Or do we focus our faith and trust on the souls, that will soon sit right where we are now, hearing God's perfect plan to alter their lives and hopes in indescribable ways?"

"I'm guessing each of us would like to help teach in this mission. Well, I got news for you – you already are. You're teaching each other how much you pay attention to your own Soul Meter."

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MisSion CriTikal

#9 – The Glob Gospel

It was the center of commotion that day in the little sheet metal shack Kustin village. The children and some teenagers too, were all grouped around something happening on the ground. It sounded a little like some hammering being done. Most of the smaller children couldn't see Lyla kneeling on the ground with a softball sized stone in her hand. Her other hand held a metal bracket being used as a chisel. But what was it? It looked like a worthless glob of something.

As the glob slowly became smaller pieces, a couple children lined up the smaller pieces in a row to be examined more closely. One of the other teens would occasionally pick up a glob piece and inspect it like you've seen rock archeologists looking for clues of the specimen's purpose and value.

The glob and its pieces were made out of something waxy, like a bunch of wax candles that had all melted together. The children kept asking each other, what it was, was it good for anything, and what Lyla would try to use it for. One of the teens noticed Lyla was breaking the glob into pieces according to their color, as best as she could.

Another teen's inspection revealed the glob had nothing to do with candles because there were no pieces of string mixed in the glob. Candles use string for a wick that holds the flame. No string; no wick; definitely not candles. So the questions continued.

Like a news bulletin on a radio, Lyla spoke to the whole group of youth, "Ya see the tent mission up there on the hill? Well you show up this Sunday a little after noon outside the tent and I'll show you what this glob is for. Ya all gonna come? I'll tell you a story about the glob – this glob. But you'll have to behave – no horseplay! OK?"

Every day until Sunday, the village children would group together and try to figure what the glob was for and what Lyla's story would be like.

Lyla explained to Lenny and Daa about the glob and what her Sunday plans were.

When the children began showing up Sunday afternoon, a

couple older teens were assigned to stand by the ropes and stakes to prevent any children running into them and being hurt. Outside the tent was a boxed in area with branches the same way that the mission had started. The children were all ushered to the boxed in area and told to face toward the tent. The boxed in area quickly became known as Lyla's Story Spot. Can you believe the Story Spot had to be enlarged the next Sunday? Sure did. And that wasn't the only time.

On the side of the tent where the roof meets the wall pieces, Lenny and Daa fixed some ragged pieces of cardboard that would soon tell a story to excited children with hungry hearts.

With all the concentration and quiet of someone defusing a live bomb, all the children watched Lyla as she began her story as she used the glob colors like crayons to draw on the cardboard.

She started with a dark black color and drew a ragged circle near the bottom edge of one of the cardboard pieces. The piece fell, but was quickly put back in place. As the story moved on, most of the children clapped, thankful that Lyla's story would continue. She explained the black was people's sin. To God, sin is blackish and ugly – it's things children and grownups do that displease Him – that make Him sad. (though Isaiah says sin is red like crimson.)

Above the black sin, Lyla drew some raindrops and explained that God was going to wash away the black sin. It would cause people to die, because the sinful people said they didn't love God. Next to the black sin, Lyla drew a boat with the brown glob piece. Peeking over the side of the boat she drew a stick man and some animal faces.

Using some red glob, Lyla drew some red lines down the side of the boat, below one of the animals. The red represented the shed blood of the sinless animal that washed away the black sin of those people who told God they loved and trusted Him.

The story that day ended with the drawing of a rainbow and God's promise it represented. What amazing things a Glob from God can do in the hands and hearts of serving saints. Try it!

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Mission Critikal

#10 – Little and Little

“Is a bear chasin' Daanum?!”

Saturday afternoon began as a plain ordinary day for the tent mission team of teens (plus Willy, of course). Each one was asking the others how they'd ever repair all the rips in the ten foot by ten foot tent God have given them. Daanum came racing up the hill to the mission so fast you'd think a grizzly bear was chasing him.

All the time he was waving a sheet of paper above his head like it was a letter straight from heaven... maybe in a way, it was. No sooner had he reached the Mission Critikal tent than he dropped on the ground like a runner steeling third base, totally out of breath.

After a minute or so of panting, he sat up and called everyone to gather around. He had received a letter of great importance to the tent mission above the little village. Neither Daa nor any of the team ever figured out how, but an evangelist in Colorado, USA got Daa's address and sent the team a letter as follows:

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Dear Mission Critikal Tent Mission,

My name is Brother Billy Hopkins and I want so much to visit you and see all the fun and challenges you are experiencing as you begin your ministry, with very little training and resources.

I am a tent evangelist, as you are. God has touched my heart to encourage you in the Lord's work, and send along this small check for your mission. I've learned that you had a teen trust Christ as his savior even before you got the tent put up. Isn't it exciting?!

Our uphill efforts become so small in our hearts while we see God moving and hearts are changed in front of us. But there are often times when it appears God has forgotten our desires to make a difference for Him, in this world around us. Sometimes He doesn't show us the easiest fastest way to get some things done. His will is often not to send an angel to us with a brand new tent or a truck load of chairs or song books.

Maybe He wants us to savor each step, each small victory, in His plan. He wants us to advance **little by little**. Well, did you know the Bible teaches us about LITTLE BY LITTLE advancement? It certainly does! God wants us to move forward on

His schedule, not ours.

The phrase in the Bible is actually “LITTLE AND LITTLE.” But it means the same. We're even told WHY God wants us to move ahead slowly, whether it's with your tent evangelism there, or my tent evangelism effort here, in Colorado.

Several reasons we (and the Jewish nation) are given for the step by step, little and little pace as listed first in Exodus 23:29, 30. God told them He'd remove their enemies a little at a time. The fields conquered from the enemies would need to be planted and cultivated and the conquering Jews wouldn't have time to do it, all at once.

Another reason the Bible gives for God moving in a LITTLE AND LITTLE pace in helping His Jewish nation drive their enemies out, is in Deuteronomy 7:22. If God snapped His fingers and killed all the enemy armies, the Jews wouldn't have enough time to bury the enemy casualties and the wild animals would multiply too fast. WOW! Isn't that great? God's schedule of doing things is best, whether it's growing food for hungry tummies or getting rid of the enemies of people He loves. (That's you and me too!)

Now I have a favor to ask of your team. It's not hard, but it is very important. I want one of you to start a journal. I want you to write down in simple words the things you do in building the mission, and I want you to clearly state the lessons you're learning along the way. The reason is, others are wanting to do the very things you are learning to do, but they don't have anyone to show them how. They need you to lead and encourage them in much the same way I am sending my heart's desire to you, in this letter.

Let me ask. When you eat an ice cream cone... do you gulp it down real fast? Certainly not. You'd freeze your tongue and tummy. But the cone is enjoyed the most when you go at it Little by Little, thanking God for the cone, but also the magnificent body to be able to savor each taste.

He wants us to serve Him the same way. Savor each victory, each of His blessings. See that He makes a long task sweeter as He shows us little shortcuts along the way.

Go His way, not our way.

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Mission Critical

#11 – Story Spot Sparkle

“Something's wrong with the children that expectantly come to the mission story spot each Sunday afternoon,” thought Lyla. There was nothing this teenage girl loved to do more than using her drawing skills, even if it was only on discarded cardboard. It had to be something just short of a miracle to watch the sparkle come to those young eyes filled with fear and hopelessness. Lyla didn't know exactly what a black hole in space was, but it couldn't be any more empty than the eyes of each of the children that lived in the ram-shackled sheet metal village at the bottom of the hill.

That sunny Saturday afternoon, she sat Indian fashion in the center of the boxed-in Mission Critical Story Spot just outside the tent. She lightly moved her hand over the ground within the story spot. In some way she hoped the ground where the precious children sat, would tell her what was wrong.

Daanum noticed her actions and slowly walked to where she was sitting. Neither teen said a word. Her heart kept asking the same question, that finally had to be spoken, “What is wrong with the children, or wrong with me that makes their sparkle disappear?” This was one of those times a person has to get all their questions out in the open – empty themselves so God can fill us with His will and purpose and power.

Lyla spoke her heart's desire for the children to Daa, not really expecting any answer; like this was a problem that neither Daa nor God could answer. How many times have we voiced our hurts and hopes with the same black-hole attitude?

“I'll be back in a minute,” Daa told Lyla as he rose to his feet and walked off. In just a couple minutes he was back and showed the teen girl what he held in his hand. At first glance it really was not much to look at. With his hand cupped and close enough for Lyla to take a close look, it was just seeds. No big deal, right? Wrong as ever you could be.

Daa's hand motion told her to follow him. They walked to an area only a few yards from the Mission Critical Story Spot where he got down on his knees. Keeping the hand with the seeds closed and protected, he began clearing the grass from a small area

maybe 1 foot by 1 foot. His hand gestures told her to watch closely. He took one seed and placed it on top of the ground. He made sure she was watching closely. A few inches away, he next poked his finger in the ground an inch or two. She saw clearly that he then took a seed and dropped it in the finger hole, and pushed the dirt in to cover the hole.

Still not saying anything, he pointed at the single seed laying on top of the ground and then at the finger hole that had a seed at its bottom.

After another pause, Daa said, “Lyla. Which seed is going to grow? Which seed will produce a beautiful flower just like the one it came from? Which seed will produce a plant that will not be blown away or die, when stormy weather threatens?”

The lesson continued with, “Lyla, the seed on top of the ground is like our lessons we teach that only reach the eyes and ears. They don't last. They don't endure. This seed planted firmly in this finger hole will sprout strong roots to grow and flourish as God has designed it to do. And then, this one seed with roots, will grow and someday produce many many seeds to spread God's beauty and creation all around us. Do you see the difference?”

“To plant God's truths that will grow roots and endure, we have to plant the seeds in the hearts of the children, not just in their ears. You might think of poking our finger in the soil is like God poking His finger of repentance into our hearts and showing us we have no power or righteousness to enter God's Heaven of ourself.

“While we share God's promises and purpose for our lives, we need to ask ourselves if the seeds of the gospel of salvation in us just lay on the top of the ground? Or are those seeds planted deep in our heart that will produce roots to grow and help others to grow. “

“Lyla. I know you love to feed the children God's truths as they sit in the Story Spot. But, you'll never be able to plant seeds of Heaven, that endure, until you have deeply planted God's salvation by grace, in your own heart. Can I pray right now, for both of us asking God to make it clear where His seeds of promise are at?”

Have the promises of Jesus Christ taken root in you?

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MisSion CriTikal

#12 – Beyond Beautiful

“WHAT'S HAPPENED TO OUR TENT?!”

Lenny sat in front of the tent with tears in his eyes. And why not? He was the teen that discovered the torn old tent in the town dump and talked everyone into making it the 'building' for Mission Critikal to reach out to the little village below.

The honest truth though, was his heavy disappointment when the extent of the rips and other defects were fully seen. He'd been encouraged watching Lyla teach all the village children in the Story Spot at the side of the tent. Lenny admitted to himself, he'd been one of the teens that more than once had agreed **“Ya Gotta Do The Best With Whatcha Got!”** But his tear-filled eyes scanned the tent in front of him and told the clouds, “This is beyond beautiful – it's beyond imagination.”

It wasn't until two days later that Lyla and her younger brother Willy showed up and explained all that had happened, at least up until now. It was largely due to Mama: Willy's mama.

Lyla explained that during two days last week that Lenny and his teen friend Daanum (“Daa”) weren't there, Mama, Lyla, Willy, and another adult village lady went to work. They wanted to show their thankfulness to the missionary teens for all their hard work and love for the children – their children.

Mama and the village lady, Ruth, had cut out patches to cover each one of the many rips on the tent. The poles inside the tent were temporarily lowered enough so all the roof patches could be installed. Lenny and everyone was really grateful to God for patching the holes but

that was only the beginning.

The beauty is first noticed by the material used to make the patches. Somewhere Mama and Ruth had found some cloth like a kitchen tablecloth. It would be a little waterproof for a while, but after all, Ya gotta do the best with whatcha got!

The patches were held in place with thin strands of a piece electrical cable, that up till now, Willy had just been practicing

making knots and weaving little pads. The patches were poked with a few holes made by a sharpened rusty nail. Outside the tent, Ruth fed the wire strand through the hole in the patch and on through the tent. Inside, Mama poked the wire back out the tent and patch to Ruth. The process was repeated all around each patch.

Maybe part of the beauty of the tent repair was noticed by Lyla. Working on the patching, the two ladies began singing little work chants, with a bit of a smile. Lyla had to walk away from the tent and get a couple deep breaths and thank Him, beyond the clouds. Lyla couldn't remember the last time she heard her mama sing. The teen thought she remembered one of mama's long-ago chants that said singin' is the best medicine, and lightens heavy loads.

Lenny stood to his feet and walked toward a patch that really grabbed his heart. On the front of the mission tent was a large patch that didn't cover any rips. It was the shape of a cross! With the same hand he'd just wiped a tear away, he touched the cross patch. His eyes saw the red in the tablecloth pattern and thought of the blood of the cross shed for his own sins. He saw the white parts of the patch that reminded him of the color of his heart after the blood had washed away all his sins. The blue in the pattern reminded him to point his eyes upward and see the one and only Creator that watches and anxiously waits for each of His children to ask for provisions and pay Him back with deep love and service.

Part of the beauty of Mission Critikal is seen when the children finish their weekly Story Time with Lyla, and almost reverently follow her, single file around the tent and point out all the beautiful patches. A few of the older children would also quiz the younger ones as to what each of the colors stood for. They'd made their own “God-Game.” Try it yourself.

One question no one knows to ask, “Why is the tablecloth in Mama's kitchen so much smaller than it used to be? Does God have folks just aching to know how they can serve Him, with their little?”

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MisSion CriTikal

#13 – Papa Jesus

'Rocket Powered'. That's it – Rocket Powered. Watching those children, especially the smaller ones with all their energy is like a rocket with feet. Lyla decided her next Sunday afternoon Story Time would include something the children would all enjoy and teach them safety and respect for God's House. No matter that this God's House was a tent with tablecloth patches.

The children were all taken to the edge of the clearing above the ram-shackled village and gathered vines and tender branches. They were then twisted around the ropes holding up the mission tent and held in place with more of the wire strands from Willy's cable. It really grabbed your heart to see the children working on the church – THEIR church – and they'd see that you respected it.

What a lesson in church-lovin'. Pitch in, help to make it better, work with others. Whether it's a tattered tent or a brick and marble mansion – change it from 'the church' to MY CHURCH. Even children know how.

“Daanum. I need some help with one of the children. We both need to talk to Toby, the 5 yr old. He's the orphan,” asked teenager Lyla. Daa replied, “OK. Is he causing problems? I know what. Why don't you bring Toby over to the tent, and just inside. Let him know right off, no one's in any trouble. We'll just have a pow-wow like Indians do, to talk things out,” Daa added with a grin.

Toby's brown cheeks and smooth skin would make him a prize for most any children's photos. His eyes were black as a coal mine. The circles of his eyes were red from the many recent tears.

“I ain't done nothin' wrong, I know of, Mr. Daa. Honest. All I done was ask Miss Lyla if Jesus would be my papa. I didn't mean no harm.” Lyla put her arm around Toby, wishing she could reach inside Toby and hug his aching heart. (Some things only God can do.)

“Why do you want Jesus for a papa,” asked Daa. “Well, 'cuz I ain't got one, like other kids do – no mama neither! I'm just a thrown-away little kid! An' that's not all. My arm here, gets ta hurtin' some days, but I can still do some things. More 'n nat, if Jesus would be my papa for real, for good, I'd mind him always.

See, Miss Lyla said Jesus is a lovin' papa and a wonderful Savior. Well, I ain't learned what a savior is, or if I need one. My empty pockets says I couldn't buy me a savior, even if I needed one. But all I need right now is a papa that loves me, even with my bad arm and empty pockets, well... except...”

Toby pulled a small smooth stone that sparkled some, if you held it up to the sunlight. “I know what, I'll give Jesus only thing I got, if he'll be my forever papa. Here's my sparkle stone,” he handed the small stone to Daa as though it was a down payment for a forever papa.

The teenager Daanum didn't really know what a for-real preacher would do or say to a child with Toby's request, but said, “Toby, you are a wonderful little boy I know Jesus wants to be a papa to. I'll hold on to your sparkle stone for right now. We'll talk more about this later, OK? And I for sure won't forget.”

Daa gave Toby a warm hug as the little boy went outside to play with the others.

Daa noticed the look on Lyla's face and asked, “Lyla, you look as though you still have something on your mind. Let's go sit under that shady tree where it's cooler and talk some about what's on your heart.”

Lyla began with, “Daa. Toby and his wanting a forever papa opened a part of my heart, I'd kept closed from God, even though I've loved teaching the children and a couple teens, in the Story Spot, each Sunday afternoon. Unlike little Toby, I understand what a Savior and Lord is. I know I must invite Jesus into my heart trusting His shed blood to pay for all my sins as my Savior. But I also know I must truly make Him the Lord of my life. I think that means I must keep Him in a place of being my loving daily boss – sort-of.”

“Well, Daa, would you help me to pray and ask Jesus to be my forever Savior and forever Lord? I never learned the right words to say.”

Actually, there's a Lyla near you. Be ready with loving guidance including snippets of scripture.

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MisSion CriTikal

#14 – Mission Quartet

Daanum noticed that three teens from the village were coming to the Story Spot each Sunday afternoon quite regular. More than that, occasionally one or two of them would take brief tours of the Mission Critikal site, being respectful of all the things in the area. There were even moments when the teens would just hang around the area after all the younger Story Spot youth had returned to their homes. Daa saw the opportunity, and acted.

He arranged with the three teen regulars to meet with them before noon the following Sunday. In the tent at the prearranged time the three teens met with Daa and Lenny. The four teens sat on the ground facing Daa, a teen himself.

Daa held up a small cardboard box for each of them to clearly see. He specifically showed each teen a different side of the same box. He then asked each teen to describe 'his side of the box'.

Because each side had different markings, each of the descriptions was a little different. He then asked the teens which of their different descriptions was correct. The four agreed that all the descriptions were correct. In fact, adding the descriptions together actually gave a better description of the box.

Daa put that box on the ground behind him and picked up another small box with a different word on each of the sides of this new box. The first word was KING. The second was an OX. The third was MAN and the fourth was EAGLE. The teens easily agreed the best description of that box would include the four words on its sides. The KING side was assigned to Ben. The OX side was assigned to Andy. The MAN side was assigned to Ian and the fourth side to Lenny.

Like a quiz program, Daa made a fast response game with the teen quartet as to their word to remember – king, ox, man, and eagle. Daa looked at Ben and said, “Ben, pretend you're a king. You're mostly interested in important people and the powerful ways they act around others. OK? You're a pretend king.” Next Daa looked at Andy and explained, “Andy, you're an ox. An ox is a powerful animal used to do farming and pull carts of people and things to places they need to go. Ya got it, Andy? You're an ox – a powerful servant to others.” Andy nodded that he understood that

he was an ox – a servant that helped get important things done.

Daa spoke to Ian saying, “Ian, you're a man. I mean, you're pretending you are a perfect man. That takes some pretending, doesn't it?” he said with a slight grin. Next, he told Lenny, “Lenny, you're an eagle with powerful eyesight always flying around in a beautiful blue sky, watching all that goes on, beneath him, on the ground. With that, Daa quizzed each teen. They were required to explain their object and why they were important.

“Each of your descriptions of the king, ox, man, and eagle sides of the box helps us to understand more about the box, right?” After a pause, Daa held up the box in front of Ben, Andy, Ian, and Lenny and said, “OK, now. I want you to think of the box with these four sides as a person – one single person. So that as you describe your four sides and the associated object, you're actually describing a person; a very important person. In fact, the most important person the world knows anything about.”

“OK. We're going to associate a person's name to each of the four objects and then the name of the box. Ya with me?” All four teens nodded yes.

“Ben, you're the king. The name you'll remember is Matthew. Andy, you're the ox – the servant. The name you'll remember is Mark. Ian, you're the perfect man. The name you are to remember is Luke. And Lenny, you're the eagle with great vision. The name you should remember is John.”

Daa did the quick response quizzing again, to test the names each teen needed to remember with their object. The teens all had fun with the quizzing.

Ian spoke up with, “Well we each got the name and object for each of the four sides. Tell us the name connected with the box. Who do these four objects describe.” Daa responded with, “That's a great question. The answer is – God's own Son, Jesus Christ. Just like the four sides of the box, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote a whole book describing their way of seeing Jesus Christ. We'll see more of this quartet next week. OK?”

What description of Jesus Christ, would you write?

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