

MisSion CriTikal

Tents, Teens, 'n Truth

by James Curtis

Introduction

The heart of a couple teenagers, for missions develops into an adventure on a zero budget. They begin without any special training, tools, or specific plan – just a burden and the Great Commission directive listed in Matthew 28.

This eduventure could actually happen with some teens you know, at a hilltop mission spot you could begin praying at. Heaven has all the provisions, promises, and hurting souls just waiting for you to see yourself entering an open door. Whether you can lead, faithfully follow, or just join hands in praying and promoting such a mission, MisSion CriTikal will shed light on your place of service to be blessed as only Heaven knows how.

by
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Book 1

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#1 - Door Slammin'

I *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 Daenum to fight back the tears, which wanted to erupt to the open sky, asking God the how, the who, the when, and why us.

The reason for Daenum's tears was the village kids. No the kids weren't mean, malicious, or anything like that. You'd understand Daenum'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.

The evangelist started it all; last July. He was the one that opened his Bible and shared the news of an open door; that's open to everyone. Lenny and Daenum sat there on the bench and could hardly believe their ears. When the song started, Daenum almost stumbled over Lenny's feet as he quickly walked to the altar rail before the song stopped and the door of opportunity 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 Daenum (or “Dae” as Lenny most often called his school friend,) patiently explained to Lenny. Hope and love soaked in truth *have* to come before quadratic equations, legal letters, and chemical concoctions.

Last September Lenny was totally hooked on Dae's attitude that never seemed to even hint of nothingness. A

couple times he heard Dae include his name in prayer of thanks for God's goodness. It was on this very spot, they were now sitting, that Dae'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 Dae and to Jesus Christ.

Not to say 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 share with 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 Dae. 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 one can see – Lenny is a zero-budget construction engineer, in teen shoes.

The boys watched the children chasing each other around the shacks and a few adults watching them. Those questions returned and tried to take root – like thorn bushes: who, how, where, which, when, and what first? It is such a hard mission (but rewarding!) to care enough to share His “Good News.”

That was probably the best question to tackle first -What's First? Where do we begin in reaching the lost? Is that your question? Where is my “START HERE”? Keep reading to find out...

[~]

#2 - In The Beginning

It didn't seem right, somehow. No it wasn't a secret or something sneaky or anything like that. Daenum 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 warming 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!” Dae 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 in fact, he had thoughts of shielding himself behind a tree to see what Dae was going to do next. “Lenny, I'm done dreamin'. Ain't no angel gonna drop down here and give us the plans for what to do first.” Dae 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 this spot and time just seemed to be a breath of fresh air to the brain, to be on the move, still not knowing exactly what's next. So they decided to be patient and have faith that in time, somehow; someday they would know what to do as a first step.

It wasn't until a month or so later that Dae 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 Dae. 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 Daenum to carry on the efforts at The Spot by himself. It was all for good reason. Those two weeks without Lenny taught Dae 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 Dae, that Lenny wasn't taking time EVERY day to pray for the efforts being done at The Spot. Even in that, Dae'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, Dae began clearing the tall grass from inside the box, but leaving the sod undisturbed. But during the grass trimming outside the box, Dae 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, as Dae was working on trimming the tall grass just outside the box and praying as he went, 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. Dae tried to see her face but the bright sun was directly behind her head shining through her hair. It was an odd thought, but Dae 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? [~]

#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?” Another lesson the two teen boys would always remember is God knows and God cares about big things like planets and He knows and cares about little things... and most importantly, God cares about 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 of hair, is the angel person who now asks Dae, “Whatcha doin?” He quickly jumps 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 says, “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 Dae and her 8 year old

brother. “Whatchew mean OUR? I don't see any one else around here except you, me, and Willy.”

Dae 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 Dae. Dae 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 do something mean?” Dae and Lyla both sat on the cool grass in a way they could keep an eye on Willy, still slowly walking around the box. “Dae, you and Lenny are all bad wrong, if you're thinking of robbing us. We all poor as an orphan polecat,” she said, gesturing toward the village.

Lyla held a clean piece of grass between her lips as Dae laid back on the grass and appeared to be watching the cotton candy clouds inch across the deep blue sky. His mind's eye was seeing the clouds, but this afternoon was thinking of that time 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 Daenum 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 Dae 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 sister started walking down the gentle slope to their sheet metal shack, they called their home.

Almost till the sun finally set, Dae 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. [~]

#4 Lyla's Sky Promise

This is going to be tricky... Daenum 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, since Lyla didn't read hardly at all. So holding a Bible with it's precious unerring words in front of her wouldn't work very well.

Near the mission spot and the boxed in area, Dae laid on the ground watching those slow moving clouds, as he so often did. As though God was just on the other side of a big

cloud over yonder, Dae began asking upward how he could share the Gospel message of Salvation to someone who couldn't read, yet wants to know more about Heaven's eternal provisions.

Not so much like a bolt of lightning or something loud or flashy, the answer came to him. It was one of God's countless promises to humans. Real so-called angels may have no appreciation for this. Dae rubbed his nose to hold back a thank you tear.

The afternoon's sun still like a toaster oven, found Dae 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 Dae. 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, Dae remembered that when he first saw Lyla, he thought she must be an angel; a teen angel.

It wasn't very noticeable 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 directly at her, Dae 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?" She didn't.

"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.”

Dae 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 awesome 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? It appears we should expand the age range of youth to be involved in missions. Give it a try.

[~]

#5 - The Torn Treasure

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

Dae 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.

Dae 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 Dae walked over to Lenny, just sure he should immediately close his eyes,

turn around and forget what he just saw. “Look at this, Dae. 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 Daenum's turn to pray, it all changed.

Dae 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, many hearts and minds were 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.

[~]

#6 – The Ten Foot Python

WHEW! This is going to be a job! Lenny, it'll be tough getting this tent up to our MisSion CriTikal spot above the village,” stated Daenum. Lenny's reply sort-of startled Dae 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.”

Dae 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, Dae. 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.” Dae had no reply for that. So that became 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 'cuz she's bringing a surprise.” Looking at the heavy tent pieces and the long hill they needed to go up, Dae 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. Dae 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 Dae's

prayer continued. By the time the Amen was spoken, everyone was looking toward the sounds. It was mama unfolding one of the 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 up one end 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-busting' 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.

[~]

#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. Daenum 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. Even to those who seemed to have a mountain in front of them.

Logic would say that teens know more and are wiser 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. A surprise was in store for every one.

The roof was unrolled, making sure the outside was facing up. It was then, that Willy, a mere 8 yr old, 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 someone of just 8 years, 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.” Dae 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. It was if she knew God's plan and how to get it done.”

The branches that were already lined up, helped provide extra stakes to anchor the tent. This is an example of God's timing and provision lesson; which the tent mission team would be taught over and over. It 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 Kritikal group previously thought of themselves as ones God would find too humble and unimportant to hear and help. He certainly had more important people and places to choose 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 and answers us all, and is never late; but He answers when He knows it will do the best for us.

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. You just do your part, trusting Him and His promises... He will answer in His time and manner. Now's the perfect time to start. [~]

#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 never seemed to 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 the teens to share the Gospel on the hillside, wouldn't God send down an angel with a brand new tent with sturdy poles and clear easy directions how to put it together?

Daenum had been noticing Lenny's sinking spirit and it weighed heavily on his heart. Dae had led Lenny to heaven's eternal salvation in Jesus Christ, on the very spot the tent was being built. Another thing that He also noticed, was Willy. Willy seemed to have chosen Lenny as a role model – someone to look up to. Lyla too, 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. Then Dae came up with what he felt God was answering him with; an answer no one would have thought of... God's answer to the declining spirit in the mission. (even before the tent was fully constructed an answer 'in meters'. EVERYONE NEEDS A SOUL METER!

Dae thought about how meters measure stuff and tell you if something's good or bad, hot or cold, slow or fast, up or down. At breakfast the next morning, Dae thought about a "soul meter" and also the many places the tent required mending, to save Lenny's treasure. More prayer from Dae's heart went heavenward and this "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. Dae 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 meeting, as he sat Indian fashion in the circle of others around the strong tent posts.

Dae 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 want to reach. Amen."

Dae continued, "I believe God has given our mission a kind of 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 everyday. 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 at work and growing.”

“Some meters have a 'cold' on one side and a 'hot' on the other. Some meters have 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 meter, or soul meter measures where our heart is, **spiritually**.”

So I ask, “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. The same souls who will soon sit right where we are now, hearing God's perfect plan to alter their lives and their hopes in His 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.”

#9 – Listening to Lyla

It was the center of commotion one day in the sheet metal shack - Kustin Village. The children and some teenagers too, were all grouped around something happening on the ground. It sounded somewhat like a 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 this 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.

As more teens inspected, they realized the glob had nothing to do with candles. 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.

This is when Lyla spoke directly 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. I'll tell you a story about this glob.”

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 Dae about this 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 from 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. Later, after the first time, the boxed in area became known as the Story Spot. Can you believe the Story Spot had to be enlarged the next Sunday? It sure did. And that wasn't the only time.

On the side of the tent where the roof meets the wall

pieces, Lenny and Dae fixed some ragged pieces of cardboard that would soon tell a story to excited children with hungry hearts and hopeless dreams.

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 God sad.

Above the black sin circle, 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!

#10 – Little and Little

“Is a bear chasin' Daenum?!”

Saturday afternoon began as a plain ordinary day for the tent mission team of teens (plus Willy, of course). Once again, each one was asking the others how they'd ever repair all the rips in this tent God have given them; seemingly forgetting to keep in check their soul meters. Daenum came racing up the hill to the mission so fast you'd think a grizzly bear was chasing him, 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. Somehow, an evangelist in Colorado got Dae's address and sent the team a letter which read 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 challenges you are experiencing as you begin your ministry. With very little training and resources; I know this is not easy.

For you see, I am a tent evangelist. God has touched my heart to encourage you in the Lord's work. So I am sending 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 God great?!

Our uphill efforts become so small in our hearts while we see God moving and hearts are changed in front of us. But keep in mind, there are often times when it appears God

has forgotten our desires to make a difference for Him. 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.

Instead, 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), as the Bible explains in Exodus 23:29, 30, are given for the step by step, little and little pace. 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 example 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 true for you and me in this day, 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, head, 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 He gave you, to be able to savor each taste.

He wants us to serve Him the same way. Savor each victory, each of His blessings. See how He makes a long task sweeter as He shows us little shortcuts along the way or in some cases He has us take the long way knowing it is best for us. Either way, always remember:

Go His way, not our way.

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#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 ramshackled sheet metal village at the bottom of the hill.

That sunny Saturday afternoon, sitting Indian fashion, in the center of the boxed-in Mission Critikal 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.

Daenum 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 Dae, not really expecting any answer; like this was a problem that neither Dae 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,” Dae 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 you could ever be.

Dae'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 seed and fill 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, Dae 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 our self.

“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 so they 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?” (Later we'll see if the Salvation Seeds in Lyla took root.)

Have the promises of Jesus Christ taken root in you?

#12 – Beyond Beautiful

“WHAT'S HAPPENED TO OUR TENT?!”

Lenny sat in front of the tent with tears in his eyes. And why not? It was his A”discovery” in the town dump that became the Mission tent to use to reach out to the little village.

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.

Lyla explained that during two of the days last week that Lenny and his teen friend Daenum 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 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 of electrical cable, that up till now, Willy used to practice 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 singing 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. He 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?"

#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.

"Dae. 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 Lyla. Dae 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,” Dae 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. Dae. 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 Dae. “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 from his tattered pocket 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 Dae as though it was a down payment for a forever papa.

The teenager Daenum 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.”

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

Dae 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, “Dae. 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, Dae, 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.

(end of book 1)

