

And a Little Child SHALL LEAD THEM

ONE FAMILY'S JOURNEY ON MISSION WITH GOD IN EUROPE

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If your family is anything like ours, your calendar is probably stuffed with kid events: camps, clubs, sports, and church, all of which compete for your children's time and attention, as well as your own. In our home, we battled against the "hurry sickness" that seems to engulf our culture, but despite our best efforts, we still find ourselves living very scheduled lives. Within this well-meaning framework it dawned on us that we were scheduling more than just our children's social calendar. We were scheduling their Christianity! Sunday School, family devotions, and bedtime prayers were all starting to feel like calendar items to check off rather than true moments with a Holy God. You know, going through the motions, doing it because it's there.

We pray for our kids to grow to be devoted disciples of Jesus, ready and willing to forsake all else for his call. Slowly an unexpected answer from God began to emerge from the cultural fog that had engulfed us, "How can you expect to teach your children to be something you are not? You need less talking and more showing!"

Just as this realization was sinking in, I received a call from an old friend and spiritual mentor. He told me he'd joined forces with Greater Europe Mission to reach the growing numbers of Muslims in Europe with the gospel. He explained his plan to place church-based teams in major cities across Europe. A group of interns would join each team, spending the first summer ransacking the city, discovering where Muslims lived, worked, and hung out. During this time, groups would come in for a week to ten days to visit and pray through those areas, chatting about Jesus with anyone who was willing.

I was all encouraged, telling him it was a great plan, until he finished the conversation by saying, "And I want you to bring your family to France next summer for ten weeks to work with Muslims in our pilot city." I quickly responded with my pat Christian answer, "Well, I will definitely pray about that." As I hung up the phone I vowed to never take my precious family to France for ten weeks to reach out to Muslims! I am beginning to learn to never say, "never." God soon reminded me of our prayer for our children and His response, "How will your children ever learn to trust me if you won't demonstrate to them how you trust me?" Fear soon gave way to determination and then resolve.

Along the way, well-meaning friends and family told us it was crazy and that we could lose our kids. We knew, however, that there are a lot of ways to lose your children. The one we feared more than all others was losing them to our own culture.

The next summer found our little family in a city in northern France. I wish I could tell you that we arrived there completely prepared for what was to come. Sadly, the truth was far from this. We quickly encountered places that frankly scared us. Paul's Ephesians 6.12 declaration that we battle against powerful, dark spiritual forces of evil came to life right in front of us. We were pushed to

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pray with a desperation we rarely experienced in our life at home where we have ample resources and know-how to deal with most situations. Our children, Virginia, seven, and Samuel, six, not only got to see us cry out to God, they also participated with us.



Early in the summer, the Lord led us to a small park where Algerian immigrants hung out. They gathered in small or large groups, many of them selling drugs to earn money. We visited the park regularly and I tried everything I could think of to break through the barriers and connect with these men. After three completely unsuccessful weeks, I turned my eyes heavenward and told God I was out of ideas. I said I'd come to the park every day and pray for these men, but if he wanted anything else to happen, he was going to have to do it. God in his goodness and grace seemed to say, "Ok. Now that you understand our roles, let's get started."

Five minutes later a police van careened up the center sidewalk of the park. It screeched to a halt and gun-wielding officers poured out. As if a bomb had dropped on the park, dealers began running in every direction. Confused and surprised, I looked around and noticed that the groups were now gone, leaving lone individuals in a few places. Wow, I had just finished asking God to do this! He opened the door for us and now our job was to step through.

I walked over and sat next to a man. He couldn't speak English, but I soon learned his name was Habib. He came through Spain on his way to France and spoke Spanish. Hearing "Spanish," my son ran over and preceded to go through every Spanish word he had learned in kindergarten the year before. As Samuel spoke, I could see Habib's eyes soften and grow warmer.

When we arrived the next day, I saw Habib standing in his normal group and gave him a smile and a nod. Suddenly,

Samuel broke from our group and made a beeline for Habib with arms stretched out wide. Habib bent down and received a hug that seemed to melt his heart. We were now "in." Habib introduced us to his friend Karim. Karim spoke a fair amount of English and listened to my testimony. He wanted to understand more so he took me to Mohammed, who owned a small snack shop on the edge of the park. Mohammed spoke perfect English and we were soon spending hours together talking about Jesus.

I didn't know it at the time, but every drug dealer in the park would come into Mohammed's snack shop to get drinks during the day. Before long we knew everyone in the park. And by the time we left France, we couldn't walk through the park without men coming to us to talk and asking us for prayer.

God grew our faith in ways I couldn't have guessed. He also showed us that our children were not just along to learn. They were there to be used by God to open doors and build bridges to the hearts of many. Their faith began to blossom as Jesus went from an academic pursuit to being the living creator of the universe who heard them when they prayed and then answered their prayers in so many ways.

This past summer we joined GEM in launching a new work in Athens, Greece. Once again we found ourselves in a position where if God didn't come through, nothing would happen. And once again, we learned we serve a mighty God who delights in using the weak to accomplish the amazing.


As he led us through the city from place to place, each time checking to see if we were still listening to him, God opened one door at a time for us. Virginia, now eight, was our prayer warrior. Her perception of what needed to be prayed over was simply a work of the Spirit. Samuel, now seven, had his spiritual radar going at all times. We finally came to a park in northern Athens. I must be honest, I wasn't "feeling it" in this park. For some reason I was unable to speak with any of the African immigrants and refugees we encountered there. In my humiliated defeat I had begun to lead my weary band out of the park, when a tug at my sleeve brought me to a halt. Samuel looked up at me and announced that Jesus just told him that this was the park where we were to work for the summer.

This bold pronouncement sparked into motion a series of events that I still look back on in disbelief. Immediately after Samuel's statement, Georgia began to converse with a young man from the Ivory Coast. They had a great chat and we agreed to meet again the next day. We were excited for the opportunity, but I knew we would have language trouble. This man spoke French and ten words of English. We speak English and ten words of French. What would happen?

The next day, while waiting for him to arrive in the park, Samuel struck up a conversation with a man from the Congo, who spoke both English and French. You probably can see where this is going. God placed that man in the park on that day so he and our family together could see God work. It turned out that our new friend was also a follower of Jesus. He became our partner in the park, translating everything we said into French. He helped us in many conversations with many interested Muslims and continues to be a leader there today! We sowed seed, left the growing to God, and watched as he did amazing things. People gave their lives to Jesus, several were baptized in the Aegean Sea, and a church was born. The gospel continues to move forward there at the time of this writing.

As I look back on the wonderful things God did in our midst these past two summers, I realize a couple of things

were at work. One, Georgia and I resolved to walk the road down which God was leading us and that we would do so with our kids. Sometimes this was against implied and explicit resistance from family and friends. And frankly, sometimes against strong resistance in our own minds. Looking back we are so glad we walked it. There is also the issue of letting our kids do more than observe and learn. We treated them, and our team mates treated them, like part of the tribe, as participants to whom and through whom God was able to speak. There were times when we would have turned and walked home, but they led us forward. And in doing so, they led forward the kingdom of God.

Let me encourage you to embrace the opportunities that God is placing in front of you. As you faithfully step through that open door please remember to take your children with you. We need them out there! 

Seven Types of Internationals Who Live Among Us

by Neal Pirolo, Director of Emmaus Road International

More people travel internationally today than ever before. Political, economic, educational, social and religious factors have led to unprecedented movements of people. Most of us can expect to be exposed to newcomers in increasing ways. I want to invite you to open your eyes to seven specific types of internationals in our midst.

International Students

At any given time, there are over one million international students from 181 countries studying in the United States. Let's do what we can so that none of them return home without visiting a Christian American home.

Refugees

Fleeing war, famine and deprivation, refugees gratefully accept entry to the U.S. and living support for six months. After that, churches are often their lifeline to jobs, housing and social services.

International Business People

International business people, already in places of leadership in their own countries, visit the U.S. briefly for economic reasons. U.S. Christians have unique opportunities to speak into their lives.

International Visitors

With the sagging U.S. dollar, America has become a bit of a bargain for international visitors. The window is open briefly, but what a chance to welcome them to the U.S., change perceptions of Americans, and perhaps invite them to think of Jesus in new ways.

Settled Ethnic Communities

As foreigners gain formal residence in the U.S., they begin to gather in communities of similar background. They build businesses, educate their children and contribute to their communities. Visit these areas, eat the food, and delight in the greatness of the God who created such diversity.

Illegal Aliens

Likely more than ten million people live in the U.S. *sans* documents. Among many tricky issues associated with this, observant believers find ample opportunity for the Gospel.

Missionary Kids

If they followed a traditional path of four years of service and one year of furlough, children of career missionaries may return to college and life in the U.S. having lived in their now home culture for no more than three years. They may appear to be Americans on the outside, but look closer and be amazed at the cultural stew bubbling inside them. They need mentoring as internationals in our midst.

The frontiers of world evangelization are not only in Tibet, Saudi Arabia, Mongolia and China. The frontiers of unreached people groups are also in Boston, New York, Chicago, San Diego and _____! (Insert the name of your town.) God has brought the internationals of the world to the doorstep of every church in America. Let's do world missions at home.

Neal Pirolo is the author of Serving as Senders. His new book, Internationals Who Live Among Us; World Missions At Home, is slated to be available in May 2013. Browse to www.eri.org for details.