

How a Surprise Encounter Showed This Woman the Depths of God's Love

After we visited the Compassion program at the local church, we prepared to do a home visit. Then I saw the leaders gather in a huddle, making a quick change to our plans. They told us the family we had planned to visit was no longer available, so we were going to visit another family. This family lived at the top of a hill in a remote area where the roads weren't wide enough for the white bus. So our group shifted gears and prepared to hike a steep and winding path, past homes built from mismatched pieces of metal and wood, to make our way to the home of a little boy named Luis.

Luis lived with his brother, sister and grandmother. We planned to chat with the grandmother and ask questions about how Compassion had changed their lives. I thought I knew what to expect, but at the top of the hill, as I walked out of the bright sunshine and into the tiny makeshift home with dirt floors, my heart nearly fell out of my chest. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I saw a little girl huddled in the corner of a couch. She was tiny, not only small but very thin. Looking at her, I knew at once she had a disability. This little girl was Luis' sister.

I thought about my David back home. I thought about the cupboard full of medicine and supplements we give him every day to keep him healthy, to ease his tummy pain, to help him breathe easier ... Then I looked at the little girl. She wore a simple dress, clean and pressed. Her hair was pulled back into pigtail braids on either side of her head. Her arms were thin, and her legs were too weak to walk. I looked around their humble home. Her grandmother made eye contact with me and told me in Spanish, "Her name is Jazmin."

We sat in a circle and began to chat with Jazmin's brother and grandmother. Their mom had left, unable to care for her children, so their grandmother had stepped in and was raising them. I wanted to stay away from Jazmin, but I felt drawn to her like a magnet. "May I hold her?" I asked her grandmother.

"Yes, yes," she said in Spanish, as she led me over to Jazmin and helped me scoop her into my arms and onto my lap.

Tears began to fall, and my heart cracked open. I felt overwhelming love for this little girl. I had wanted to stay away to protect my heart, but I couldn't. I sat on the couch, holding Jazmin in my arms and falling in love with her. Steve moved over and sat beside me.

"Our son has a disability too," he told Jazmin's grandmother. Her eyes lit up. We were the same. We lived in different countries, spoke different languages and had different skin tones and different socioeconomic situations, but we were the same. We were parents who loved our children. We each knew the pain of caring for a child whose life looks different because their body or mind doesn't work like it should. As we sat together, holding Jazmin and talking with her grandmother, we were on holy ground.

I thought about how our plans had changed at the last minute and how we ended up in this home. We hadn't planned to meet Jazmin, but God had other plans. Steve and I talked that evening about how profoundly impacted we were by Jazmin. We agreed it was a miracle that we ended up going to her home. I shared with him how I hadn't wanted to hold her but couldn't stay away. I was drawn to her; my arms had to hold her.

The next morning, we climbed on the bus with the velvet curtains once more and made our way to the local Compassion office for a tour. After the tour, we walked outside into the garden to bask in a little sunshine. A woman named Katherine approached me.

"I heard you met Jazmin and her grandmother yesterday," she said. "I met Jazmin a few months ago, and every day I have been praying that God would send someone to encourage her grandmother."

Her words stopped me in my tracks.

"Really?" I asked. I could feel a lump forming in my throat.

Meeting her wasn't an accident. We didn't just happen to go to Jazmin's house. God planned this whole thing. God loved Jazmin, a little girl with a disability who lived at the top of a hill in a remote area in the Dominican Republic.

To the world, Jazmin was no one, and yet to God, she was precious.

My short conversation with Katherine gave me more insight into the events of the previous day. I thought about how God had moved heaven and earth to answer her prayer. He took Steve and me on two plane rides, an hour-long drive on a bus with velvet curtains, and a long hike up a steep hill. He took us to a very specific place for a very specific purpose. I thought about how God so extravagantly demonstrated his love for Jazmin. He cared for her. In a world that says this little girl doesn't matter, God says, "She matters to me. She is worth every diamond, every pearl. She is beautiful and worthy. She is mine."

It was hard not to think about my own precious child. What if David had been born at the top of a hill in a remote village in the Dominican Republic? What would David's life have looked like?

God calmed my heart and told me, "I would meet David, just like I met Jazmin. I would meet David and provide for him, just like I do right now. It would look different; the landscape would be different; the circumstances would be different, but I am the same God. David is worth every

diamond, every pearl. He is amazing. He is worthy. I love him, and he is mine.”

I breathed in deeply, soaking up this beautiful thought.

Yes, I believe it. I had seen it firsthand. God gave good gifts to his children.

He loved Jazmin. He loved David. I sat with this beautiful truth and let it soak into my heart.

Then God ambushed me with a whisper.

“And you too. I love you, Lisa...” {eo}

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Lisa Leonard is the founder of Lisa Leonard Designs. She started making jewelry as a hobby-business and together with her husband, Steve, built it into a multimillion-dollar company that today employs more 300 people in five countries. Her book, Brave Love: Making Space for You to Be You, was published by Zondervan on Jan. 29, 2019.