

Rescue and Restoration, One Barefooted Step at a Time

Eating bowls of chicken and rice from Joyce Meyer Ministries, a dozen barefoot children in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, enjoyed a break until the next garbage truck arrived. Maybe carrying fresh food—a half-eaten piece of chicken, apple or banana—the noise of dump trucks stirred the children to action. Burrowed holes in the garbage sheltered the children, two of them wearing tattered flip-flops, from bad weather and nighttime dangers.

A Messianic Jew serving with Joyce Meyer Ministries in 2010, Dr. Jeff Brodsky remembers talking to God about the barefoot, hungry children to whom he'd ministered that memorable day in July.

"When I went back to my room that night, I took off my shoes and socks while talking to God about my experience that day—I talk with Him all the time—and I felt like He was impressing me to go barefoot in solidarity with impoverished and trafficked children," Brodsky says.

At the time, Brodsky's JOY International, a ministry he founded in 1981, had rescued girls as young as 4-years-old from brothels in India, Thailand and Cambodia. It is committed to rescue, restoration, reintegration of children, teens, young women and boys devastated by trafficking, especially people sold to brothels. Prevention is also a goal of JOY.

Assured of God's voice telling him to live barefoot for one year, Brodsky felt as though he was going to fall on the floor laughing like Abraham did when his wife Sarah heard the couple would conceive a child in their old age.

"I live at 9,000 feet of elevation in Bailey, Colorado. What would I do in the winter?" Brodsky recalls asking God the

night of July 19 in a hotel room.

Brotsky obeyed God's instruction on his return home, standing barefoot at the airport in Denver. The driver picking him up, Gail Brotsky, asked her husband the obvious question, "Where are your shoes?"

For a solid year Gail Brotsky cleared a path for her husband's feet outside their home in the snowy Rocky Mountains, and inside Jeff walked around the house barefoot for the next 365 days.

One year later on July 19, 2011, Brotsky planned to put on a pair of white socks he'd laid on an ottoman the night before.

"It was as if there was a tug-of-war. I could not get the sock past my toes. As much as I pulled, there was a force pulling the other way.

"A still, small voice spoke to me in the way only God could. These are the words I heard verbatim, and He only had to say it once: 'Keep going. Those children are still out there.'

"That was enough for me," says Brotsky, who decided then to continue his barefoot journey.

One of three things will change Brotsky's mind: God speaks again, telling him time's up; the last child is rescued; or he goes home to Jesus.

When people ask Brotsky why he is barefoot, he answers with one word—obedience. "I believe on July 19, 2010, God asked me to. When God asks you to do something, you have two choices—yes or no," he says.

On July 19, 2022, Brotsky marked 12 years on his barefoot path, and he doesn't know when, if ever, the journey will end.

In 12 years, JOY has reached hundreds of thousands of people with the plight of trafficked children, and through training

international law enforcement in rescue strategies, 3,000 children, teens and young women have gained freedom in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Philippines, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Belize, Honduras, Mexico, Sierra Leon, Cambodia, Uganda and America.

Still, there are an estimated 40 to 45 million people who are trafficked around the world, maybe as many as 400,000 in America.

Three years into Brodsky's barefoot travels, he's personally visited 77 countries including a Spirit-filled youth group in Coshocton, Ohio, which organized a fundraiser for JOY. Calling it the Barefoot Mile, New Life Ministries youth raised thousands of dollars to help Brodsky fight trafficking.

"I never went barefoot with the thought of it being used as a fundraiser," he says.

The inspired Barefoot Mile remains a thought-provoking fundraiser for JOY in many cities across the country, and this fall it is looking for a boost from the 5.5 million students who are home-schooled in America.

Two-thirds of the nearly 6 million home-school families are Christian. The United States Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, published in April 2021, cites 12.1% of Hispanic households home school; 9.7% are white; 16.1% are Black; and 8.8% are Asian.

With backing from a publisher of home-school materials, JOY is launching a comprehensive curriculum, the *6:8 Freedom Project*, for children and teens. Based on Micah 6:8, "do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God," the curriculum provides faith-based and age-appropriate lessons on trafficking.

While "reading the red," the words of Jesus, in his Bible years ago, Brodsky was struck by the phrase "the least of these" spoken by the Lord in Mathew 25:40. In search of

understanding, Brodsky traveled to Biafara, Africa, for ministry to destitute children and, in India, he reached out to lepers.

“I thought it couldn’t get any lower than this ... until I found human trafficking and what was happening to children,” says Brodsky, who holds a Doctor of Divinity Degree and is also the author of *The Least of These* and a children’s book, *Why Are You Barefoot?*

He’s learned girls who are trafficked stop believing in God after days, weeks, months and years of seemingly unanswered cries for help. “When I see one of these girls rescued, put into a safe house, their lives turned around in a praise and worship service with such passion, that’s it for me,” says Brodsky, a father and grandfather who resembles Santa Claus.

With a call to JOY’s offices, Brodsky secured \$8,000 for repairs to a water well while in Kasese, Africa. Until the well was repaired, children walked 11 miles with 40-pound water pots, and risked being kidnapped and genital mutilation by witch doctors who profited from the sale of male and female reproductive organs.

“There are things I can’t share publicly because of how heinous and nefarious these things are, and what they do to these children,” Brodsky says through tears.

In America, training to spot trafficking is leading to rescues, particularly at airports. In Alaska, a United Airlines manager witnessed suspicious activity and acted immediately. As a result, a preteen girl was rescued from the back of a van from which she was trafficked. The manager told police, “I never would have noticed that if it wasn’t for the training I received from JOY International.”

The ministry was named by Brodsky who was “reading the red” in John 15:11, where Jesus stated, “I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will

overflow!”

Brotsky says that practicing JOY–Jesus first, others second and yourself last—is the key to experiencing real joy. {eoa}

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