

How a Little Girl From India Rocked My World

I always get my biggest attitude adjustments when I see Third World poverty.

The Lord often provides me with a big, fat dose of reality when I travel overseas. It happened this week in India when I looked into the frightened face of Divya, a frail 4-year-old girl. Just a few days ago her poor parents abandoned her in Tanuku, in eastern Andhra Pradesh, because they already had three daughters. They wanted a son.

So they dumped their child on the side of a road.

When I met little Divya she would not smile no matter how much I coaxed her. She was traumatized. My friend Raja, who found her and took her to the girls' home he runs with his wife, said Divya had not spoken in four days.

"She usually cries herself to sleep at night," Raja said. "She doesn't understand what is happening."

There are already more than 30 girls living in Raja's house—and all of them have similar stories. Some were orphaned when their parents died, but many were abandoned because they live in a culture that devalues females. Two of the girls were found alive in trash bins when they were infants.

Raja has also found a few dead baby girls in roadside trash piles. Pigs had eaten parts of their bodies.

This week I spent time with Raja, his wife, Padma, and the girls, and I toured the three-room house in Tanuku where they all live. More than 10 girls share each room. They sleep on mats. They have access to two toilets (but no hot water for baths), and they all have lice.

Raja and Padma have two young children of their own, but they manage to feed the orphaned girls rice and vegetables every day. They serve meat only once a week, in very small portions. They trust God to provide for the girls' school fees. They also teach them the Bible and take them to their Pentecostal church on Sundays.

Last Sunday afternoon after church, we took all the girls to a water park in Tanuku. The admission to the park was \$2 U.S., but that is too much for most poor children in India. These girls had never even seen a swimming pool.

They giggled nervously before dipping their toes in the water. Some were frightened of the slides. But before the afternoon was over most of the children were splashing each other and playing games in the pool.

Everyone but Divya, the girl who had been abandoned a few days ago. "She was very scared, and she even tried to run out of the water park," Raja told me. "But when we brought her back, she just sat alone."

But because there is so much love and security in Divya's new home, she finally cracked her first smile the day before I left Tanuku—and she joined in singing a song about Jesus with the other girls.

Her wounded heart is already being healed thanks to Raja and Padma's compassion.

Divya's story reflects what is happening in India today. Even though women and girls suffer unimaginable cruelty and rejection, and even though millions still suffer in indescribable poverty, the gospel is spreading at an accelerated pace. India's new believers are not only planting churches and evangelizing unreached areas but they are also showing Jesus' love to orphans, widows, lepers, prostitutes and people of the lowest social caste.

Every time I come to India I get a much-needed shock treatment. I realize how spoiled I am. I repent for whining and complaining about stupid material things that don't matter. After only a day here, I suddenly sense a new gratitude for running water, flush toilets, hot showers, a comfortable bed, reliable electricity and paved roads.

And even after this attitude adjustment, I still am haunted by my encounter with Divya. She totally messed me up. I can't just go back to my comfortable suburban bubble knowing that little girls like her are being left on roadsides. Her pitiful cry was my wake-up call.

I believe God is calling all of us to renounce our self-absorbed American prosperity religion so we can hear the cries around us. Let's stop whining and be thankful. And let's open our hearts to receive His compassion for the millions of Divya's who need our love.

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