



# The New Joshuas of Kenya

*A Personal Insight of My Mission Trip to Ngatataek, Kenya*

***When I was only eight years old, I started going to work with my father as soon as school was out for the summer. Dad owned a plumbing and heating business for many years. Of course at the age of eight, I started with the basics of sorting fittings, cleaning up the shop, and learning the names of all the materials used on the jobs. As time progressed I learned the trade, literally from the ground up. Little did I realize God was preparing me for one of the most important events of my life...***

During the first week of September, I joined six other men and traveled to the small, remote village of Ngatataek about two and a half hours south of Nairobi, Kenya. It was the first time I had ever been part of a mission trip of that scope and distance and I will admit, I was bit anxious about it. Having Yellow Fever shots, vaccinations for Hepatitis A and B, a polio booster, and a regimen of Malaria pills prior to leaving didn't help calm my nerves. (Especially when I had a adverse reaction to one of the medications!) But I knew in my heart I needed to be a part of this team.

It took a full two days to arrive in Nairobi but the next morning our hosts, Lynn & Doris Cazier, provided a nourishing breakfast and we headed out on the final leg of the journey. It was Sunday and we were to worship with the Maasai people at the Community Christian Church in Ngatataek when we arrived. After a long and very bumpy ride, we pulled into the Ngatataek Training Center, our home for the next several days.

A surge of excitement ran through me as we passed through the gates of the compound. I was immediately struck by the beauty of the remote location. Barren trees were laden with nests that looked like large Christmas ornaments. I later learned they were formed by Weaver Birds. The dusty earth was brick red and splashed out from beneath the wheels of our vehicle. Hand cut stones with thick mortar joints formed the long, narrow rectangular building of the training center. The roof was galvanized tin and bright blue paint accented the fascia boards and doors. Even before we left the vehicle, I could physically sense the presence of God.

We piled out of the cramped confines of the Land Rover and slowly stretched our bodies back into human form. I took a deep breath and stood silently. The sound of a young woman leading a worship song filtered up from a short distance away. Other voices echoed her words.

*Opposite: Our team and the Maasai pastors begin to gather in the early morning for a time of singing and a short teaching from God's Word. The training center is in the background.*

Then I saw the church. Another small, unassuming structure built from the same materials. The windows and doors were pulled wide open. It was evident church was already in progress and probably had been for some time.



After a quick sweep of the compound to get our bearings, Lynn and Dori escorted us to the front entrance of the church. We entered quietly, not wanting to interrupt the service. Immediately some of the men scrambled to get enough plastic lawn chairs for each of us. Even though I couldn't understand much of what was being said, I knew exactly what was meant. We were their guests and the smiles on their faces spoke volumes about how glad they were we had finally arrived.

The service continued without interruption for about another twenty minutes as the minister continued to preach from a black, well worn, Maasai Bible. He glanced over to

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Inside the small church at Ngatataek. One young lady had the most amazing voice and helped lead our praise and worship.

Paul Lupempe and nodded. Paul can best be described as the overseer of the ministry efforts in this area. He helps lead a group of pastors, elders, and evangelists as well as being instrumental in the day to day operations of the training center and school located on the grounds.

Paul translated for us that it was time to honor the guests that have arrived from America. The minister, speaking through Paul, said it is fitting they should introduce themselves first so we would not be at a disadvantage.

One by one the men stood and introduced themselves, their wives, and each one of their children. They spoke humbly and shared how glad they were we had come to

visit and worship "Almighty God" with them this day. They were proud their families had come to know Jesus Christ and welcomed us in His name.

Then it was our turn and were invited to come to the front of the church. Each one of us spoke through Paul and told them of our families and how glad we were to have the privilege of coming to this beautiful land. Altogether the introductions lasted about forty five minutes, but it seemed like an instant. We shared lots of laughs, smiles, and stories and a genuine bond began to form.

After more songs had been sung and Bible verses read, it was time for the service to end. One of the elders started a praise song then started down the center aisle toward the front door. The other men followed in single file and motioned for us to join the line. We exited the building and descended the front steps.

The second person in line then shook hands with the leader and gave him two hugs, the first on the right side of the head, the second on the left side. The third person then did the same with both the leader and the second man. The fourth person followed suit with the first three and so on until everyone who had been in the church had been greeted and hugged by everyone else. (We had been advised it would not be appropriate to hug the women; it was more proper to simply shake their hand.)

Once everyone had left the building and the last chorus had been sung, we all clapped our hands and gave shouts of joy. It was then I began to realize a small portion of what God had in store for me. Needless to say, it was a great start to an unbelievable week.

Of course as Americans, we had our list of things to do during our time there. The two major projects we wanted to complete was to run several water lines to prepare the center for when water would actually reach the training center. The second was to continue construction of a large chicken house in an effort to begin having an income source. The concept being to raise chickens and gather the eggs for sale in the local markets to provide income for further improvements and support of ministry efforts.

We soon learned the Maasai had a slightly different set of priorities. Sure, accomplishing certain tasks was important; they were very hard workers and we found it hard to keep up with them. But it was developing relationships with their new Brothers in Christ that was foremost on their hearts.

Each morning after breakfast we would gather with the Maasai men under a tree for a time of praise and worship and the honor of sharing a thought with them from God's Word. It was this time together that had the greatest impact on my life.

The Maasai men would lead us off with a rousing chorus or two of their praise songs. I'm sure we looked a bit awkward to them as we tried to sing, dance, and clap our hands all at the same time. We all got a good laugh out of that. Then we were invited to sing a praise song or two. They certainly were more adept at catching on than we were.

'Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.'

— Leviticus 19:32



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After lots of joy and laughter, we took our seats on the benches in what the Maasai call "Zebra style." That is, white, black, white, black, and so on. I had the honor and privilege of leading our devotional time one morning.

I chose to share some thoughts from Joshua 1:1-9. In that passage the Lord tells Joshua, "Moses, my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give them." It was amazing how powerful my words became as Francis translated them into Maasai. It was evident, God spoke deeply into all of our hearts that morning.

I shared with them that God had chosen them to be the new Joshuas of their land. They had been chosen by God Himself to lead their people. They nodded affirmatively and whispers of "Amen" and "Sifa Yesu" (Praise Jesus) could be discerned.

We worked our way through the passage noting how God has given them specific instructions of how they could accomplish this formidable task. How God has promised to give them everyplace they set their foot. How God will never leave them or forsake them. How God encourages them several times to be strong and courageous; to be careful to obey all of God's laws and never let His Word depart from them. How they need to fill their minds and hearts with His Word and meditate of it day and night. "If you do all these things," Francis Siparo translated for me, "then God promises you will be prosperous and successful in your mission."

Gathered there, in God's presence, language was no barrier. Race was no barrier. Culture was no barrier. I knew full well God was speaking into their hearts, as well as mine, in this simplest of settings.

By the time we had finished I could no longer hold back my tears as I offered up a prayer asking God to bless their work in this new Promised Land of southern Kenya.



*A private school was started as a service to the community. It has since grown to include between 80 and 90 children.*

I've heard others talk about their "mountain top experiences" and I've had a few of them myself. But this was by far the greatest one of my life. Here in one of the most remote places I've ever been, sitting under a tree on dusty, termite-ridden benches, I don't believe I've ever felt so close to God or to sense so powerfully how He could use me to further His work in ways I could not begin to ask or imagine.



*Lynn & Dori Cazier, moved from Decatur to Nairobi in 2003 to serve among the Maasai people.*

Our first full day at the training center fell appropriately on a Monday and we rose early for breakfast. After our morning devotions, it was time to begin work on the projects we had determined to be a priority during our stay. Lynn Cazier gathered four of us together while the other

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"She said, 'If I thought you really were the real Santa, I would ask you for something.' And I said, 'Well you can ask me for anything and we can talk.'" Kelly begins to fight back the tears and pauses once again. He swallows hard and continues, "She said, 'I want my dad to come home from Iraq.'" At this point we both pause to gather ourselves, reflecting on the impact of that little girl's wish.

Kelly takes another deep breath. "I said, 'You know what? That is bigger than Santa. But Santa believes in praying. and Santa believes in Jesus. And Jesus answers our prayers. And I will pray.' And I asked her name, and I asked her dad's name. I said, 'Santa will pray that you see your dad soon.'

So God must have heard the prayer, because as far as I know, the child's father is home; safe. So you know, it's those moments that make it all worthwhile. That's just God going before you. That prevenient grace of God. God doesn't always fulfill all of our wishes, but sometimes He does." I whisper a reflective, "Amen."

There are those who believe Santa is only part of the huge commercialization of Christmas and in some respects, that's certainly true. But I can't help believe Santa is often under appreciated in Christian circles. After all, he does represent a lot of what Christianity is all about; generosity, joy, innocent faith, sacrificial giving, hope, and of course, love. We need to remember it was the Apostle Paul who said, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."

The Editor's response to Virginia's question regarding the existence of Santa included the following insight:

"You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world."

We cannot see Christ, but that certainly doesn't prove He doesn't exist. Perhaps Santa is an earthly image created to be a bridge between an unbelieving child or adult, and Christ. Perhaps if we, ourselves, embraced the qualities of Santa and expressed them more openly to others, they might see glimpses of Christ within us. And that, my friends, is an opening to share the true love, grace, and mercy of Christ.

Virginia's question of whether Santa really exists points to a much deeper question. Perhaps the question should be, "Why don't more people live like they are Santa?"

Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

*"This will be a sign to you:  
you will find a baby wrapped in cloths  
and lying in a manger." Luke 2:12*

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