

A Future and a Hope for the World's Poorest Children

When Kathie and I got married in 1983 we decided to sponsor a child through the Christian charity Compassion.

Compassion first began over sixty years ago, when Everett Swanson, an army chaplain to American troops in the Korean War, grew troubled by the sight of war orphans living on the streets with no one to love them.

On his final morning of his tour of duty, he saw city workers scoop up what looked like piles of rags and toss them into the back of a truck. He approached to take a closer look and shuddered in horror when he realised that they were disposing of the frozen bodies of orphans who had died overnight in the streets.

Swanson raised money to build an orphanage but soon developed a unique programme that allowed individuals in the USA to provide education, food, clothing, shelter, medical care and the chance to learn about Jesus for a Korean orphan for a few dollars a month. Compassion's child sponsorship charity was born. South Korea was the first country to benefit from sponsorship programmes but, such has been the transformation there since the Korean War, South Korea is now one of Compassion's main sponsoring countries.

Compassion now runs thousands of church-based projects in 26 countries for children in extreme poverty, to whom sponsors can write and receive regular translated letters.

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it (Proverbs 22.6).



We have sponsored about ten different children over the years - in Haiti, Peru, Guatemala, India and Kenya, and we now sponsor two boys and two girls, all in Ethiopia.

At the end of last year, we got to meet one of them, a 17 year-old girl called Hasena, which was quite a moving experience. After eight years of writing letters back and forth and praying for her, there she was before us smiling shyly and presenting us with a handcrafted coffee pot which now has pride of place on my office window sill. From one of the poorest families in her village, she now has ambitions to one day be a doctor.

We visited five different child sponsorship projects in Addis Ababa each of which cared for several hundred children. In every case the children were full of life and proud to show us around. We met hardworking staff and church leaders (all the projects are based in local churches) and we were very moved by their passion to bless their communities.

One project was based in a Pentecostal church that started about 20 years ago in a predominantly Muslim suburb. The church was only small when it started, just a few dozen people and they were not welcomed by the local community. Week after week, their modest building with flaking paint and plastic chairs was pelted with stones as the people gathered to worship. But when they registered with Compassion as a child sponsorship project and admitted children without regard to their religious background, attitudes began to change. Now, that church is 1,800 strong, has planted 4 other churches, and is one of the most respected organisations in that suburb of Addis Ababa.

We took a tour round the national office with its piles of letters from sponsor to child and vice versa in the process of translation. The staff there, some of whom were formerly sponsored children were thoroughly committed to doing their jobs with excellence to God's glory. We saw how each project is vetted and regularly inspected to ensure adherence to Compassion's high standards.

We also visited three sponsored children's family homes. The house below left was typical; just one room, not even a third of the size of the Londonderry Chapel, with a dirt floor, mud wall and corrugated iron roof. No toilet, no running water, no furniture to speak of; just a single lightbulb hanging from a wire that had seen better days. It was really humbling to be treated like royalty, but for these families the charity we represented was the only way out of generations of poverty for them. They knew that, for the first time in generations, their children would have a chance in life.

The scene below right was heartbreaking. Our guide and translator, a local man who has seen a lot in his time, fought back tears. An old tarpaulin stretched out against the wall beside a busy highway was someone's home. From inside came incessant shouts and banging on a saucepan. A mentally ill mother with a little tot afraid to go inside. But that small boy has just been sponsored by a complete stranger in another country who will ensure that he has every chance of ending the cycle of poverty he was born into - and who will grow up knowing how much Jesus loves him too. Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Matthew 18.5).



On the last evening we met three young adults, all taken out of extreme poverty as small children, and who are now university graduates. Each was fluent in English and sharp as a tack. One was a teacher. One was a health care professional. And one was an engineer who had just invented a way of speeding up the drying process for coffee beans by a factor of ten! But most of all, they all had a shining love for the Lord Jesus and a passion to change their nation for his glory.

John Lambert

Compassion International: releasing children from poverty in Jesus' name.

In response to the Great Commission, Compassion International exists as an advocate for children, to release them from their spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty and enable them to become responsible and fulfilled Christian adults.