

A letter from Rachel Weller in Ethiopia

June 2013

Dear Friends,

Micah 6:8 is a verse I have been thinking about a lot over the past several years. “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” There are lots of things to say with that verse as a theme, but I won’t bore (or amuse) you with my amateur theology. This verse, however, has been a guide to much of what I have chosen to do.

This week I was faced with a situation. It has not disappeared, of course. I am still in a dilemma. I made friends with a family—the only other family—living on the church compound where Michael and I make our home. They have moved now, but they were here when we arrived. Mary was living in the student housing of the Jack Jordan Bible School with her four children. Her husband had been a student the year before. He was a promising student, well liked by classmates and teachers. So it was a shock to the school and a huge blow to his young family when he died suddenly. Because she didn’t have anywhere else to go, the school gave Mary a room where she could stay for a year. That’s when I met them.



Nyak (left) and friend

Nyak, being too young for school and old enough to wander around on his own, began to come visit me every morning. He is a bright, delightful kid. We became good friends. He helped me with housework and I gave him things to do—paper and pencil, a mattress to play on ... or with.

But Mary was struggling to find food for the family. She, along with the community, made the decision to move everyone out to Lare (*lah reh*) on the border of South Sudan, where her late husband’s family lives. According to Nuer culture, they are responsible for her and the children and since she has no way to support herself in Gambella, it made sense to move. There is probably some food there.

The schools, though... They tell me there is a school there. Is it any good? The best response I got to that question was a shrug of the shoulders. Schools in rural Ethiopia are mostly poor. The schools in Gambella Region of Ethiopia are some of the worst in the country.

Nyacieng, the oldest and the only girl, is somewhere around 12 years old. Nyak is a smart kid.

As someone who has shown some interest, I have become an “African” relative. Relatives are expected to contribute to the well-being of the whole family.

So now tell me, what is the just thing to do? What is the merciful response?

I don’t expect an answer. There are many answers ... and no answers. I will do my best to figure out what God is asking me to do for this family. I know what he has asked me to do for the community. Rightfully I can deny



Nyacieng making Marijke beautiful!

any obligation to specific people. I contribute to the church and to the community as a whole. Then why do I have a knot in my stomach thinking about Mary, Nycieng, Buom Koth, Nyak, and Bang Ping?

The one assurance I have is that no matter what I do, nothing I do will have any future without God's hand of blessing on it. As much as I weep for the struggling single mothers of Gambella, I am humbled by the price God paid so that they may have life, and have it abundantly! I can only imagine the tears that He sheds, knowing how much better life could be.

I am fully aware that the easy response to this is to pull out your wallets, checkbooks or Macbooks and present, sign, or click some funds over to someone who will present your gift to Mary. This is not the reason I wrote this letter. I only wrote this story because it was an issue I am faced with daily as I live in Gambella. In writing this, I hoped that you will consider participating in a partnership with hurting people in the world somewhere—there are too many places.



So much fun with a mattress!!!!

As a PC(USA) mission co-worker, I represent many of you who are members or attenders of PC(USA) congregations. Without your financial support, Michael and I would not be able to serve God as your representatives. Without your prayers the spiritual impact on the people of this region would be limited. Without your friendship and correspondence we are tempted to rely on our own strength to persevere.

In Christ's service,
Rachel Weller

These books have also helped me formulate ideas (not answers) about how to deal with poverty:

When Helping Hurts, by Steve Corbett, Brian Fikkert, and David Platt

African Friends and Money Matters, by David E. Maranz

Toxic Charity, by Robert Lupton