



AT KICS

Recently I wrote a blog post about the knocks at our front gate. It isn't uncommon for strangers to come by looking for work, food, money, or other solutions to their pressing needs. As I'm sure most of you can nod in agreement, it's difficult to know the best way to help. People living in desperate situations abound here. What does helping look like? How do you give here without enabling? While in America, I had my struggles and hesitant moments, but I felt as though I had a fairly firm grasp of what helping looked like.

Things are a bit more confusing here in Rwanda. There is substantial poverty within a short drive from our home. Most Rwandans don't have running water, electricity, or basic healthcare. Unemployment is high (28% for females; 15% for males), and even those who are employed struggle greatly. Money is scarce for most families. There is no welfare system or any government help for families that are struggling and no child protective services- but that's a different conversation. So when a knock comes at our gate and a need is shared with us, what is the faithful, compassionate response? What would Jesus do?

I'll briefly share about two Jeans (most Rwandans have French names due to the Belgian colonization in the 1930s). Jean Pierre is in his 30s, although he looks to be pushing 50. He was the guard/gardener of the family living next to us when we first moved in, and so he spent his days doing yard work and opening and closing their gate. We would faintly see his figure moving about next door through the ivy covered fence separating our properties. The boys would talk with him through the fence and eventually Pierre began throwing a ball back and forth with him on most afternoons.



Our front gate

Around 8PM one evening we heard a knock on our gate and discovered that it was Jean Pierre. He looked distraught and we had a hard time understanding what exactly was going on because of his broken English. We invited him in and offered him dinner. It was the first time I had actually seen his face and had a conversation with him. His clothes were dirty and from the smell that filled our home it was clear that it had been a while since he had showered. This scene and smell became familiar to our family in the following weeks. Eventually, on that first evening, we gathered that a family member had died in another area of the country. Through the course of the next 30 minutes or so we learned that Jean Pierre and most of his family had HIV and that none of them had attended school past early elementary. Our neighbors (his employers) were out of the country, and so it seemed he was turning

to us for help. Apparently our friendliness and warmth encouraged him to knock. He needed 5000 Rwandan francs for bus fare to attend the funeral. 5000 RWF is a very high daily wage for most people in Rwanda. It amounts to about \$6.75. What to do? Even in that moment we sensed that there was a substantial, powerful current of cultural norms and expectations swirling around us that we neither knew nor understood. But what would Jesus do? We decided to err on the side of compassion and gave him the 5000RWF, explaining from scripture about God's love and how we are freely giving because we have freely been given to. After praying with him we said goodnight.



Jean Paul, a friend who regularly knocks on our gate with a need.

Jean Paul is a 13 year old boy who knows very little English. He came by our gate one afternoon saying that we was thirsty and Wendy welcomed him in. His clothes and his odor told us that he was a younger version of Jean Pierre. He spent several afternoons at our house eating, spending time with our family, and playing simple games with the boys. It was clear from the first visit on that we needed to keep a continuous eye on him. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, several of our possessions disappeared on days that Jean Paul visited. On one such occasion, Wendy asked him where the headphones were that he had just been holding in his hands. He casually pulled them out from underneath his sweatshirt and handed them back to her. Again, how would Jesus respond to the Jean Paul's that knock on our gate?

A friend, who has lived in Rwanda for seven years, shared a cultural insight with us that has been incredibly helpful. Rwanda, like the culture in New Testament times, has a patron-client system. Everyone back then, and in Rwanda today, found themselves within this system of interdependence and obligation. The patron was expected to provide assistance to their clients, be it social, financial, material, or a recommendation. The client showed honor and loyalty to the patron. Most people were both client and patron within the social web, unless you were Caesar (not a client to anyone) or the poorest of the poor (not a patron to anyone). The same is true in Rwanda. Within your social network you might have a handful of people who regularly come by asking for assistance. The expectation is that you will set aside a sum of your time and income to offer this assistance.

But you also might have a handful of people who are higher up in the social structure which you regularly turn to for assistance, whether it is a word of recommendation, a red tape cutting favor, or whatever the case may be.

That was the first of many knocks on our gate from Jean Pierre. Each knock was accompanied with a desperate story. At one point his sister had died in the hospital, and he had until 7AM the next morning to bring 10,000RWF to provide a casket for her proper burial and prevent the hospital from discarding her body. Jean Pierre spent several evenings sitting on our couch, eating, drinking, and sharing how alone he was and without hope. Each crisis he came to us with seemed legit. We never sensed that he was pulling one over on us. He was a poor man with no education, caught in a systemic spiral with seemingly no way out. What should our response be to the Jean Pierre's that knock on our gate?



View of the walled yards from our bedroom window.



Here are a couple of helpful principles we have learned from those who have navigated this cultural system much longer than we have:

1. Don't feel as though you are their only source of help. They have several patrons that they turn to when in need. Never give the full amount. When Jean Pierre asked for 10,000RWF for the coffin, we should have given him 3,000. He not only would have been grateful and accepting of this, but somehow he actually would have respected us more for it.
2. Be blunt. Rwandan culture is much more straightforward than Western culture (and way, way, way more blunt than Chinese culture!). If a 'client' violates your trust you should tell them that next time they come. If you think they aren't being honest about a need you should say, "I'm sorry but I don't believe you." They will accept this and respect you for it.

Needless to say, we are still infants in this culture and so much of this feels awkward and even a bit off. We want to be faithful stewards of what God has entrusted to us, our resources and our friends ('clients') who knock on our gate. But we're learning as we steer our way through this new culture.



VEHICLE FUND

We're often asked about our transition here and how we are settling in. So far it's been an amazingly smooth adjustment period. Certainly there are aspects of life that are easier as compared to our time in China and others that are not. One of which is transportation. China's bus system was extensive and taxis were cheap. This is not the case in Kigali though. Whether we are buying groceries, headed to church, or Wendy is working with various ministries, the cost of taxis is, frankly, devouring our budget. After going back and forth and crunching the numbers for several weeks, we've prayerfully decided to pursue fundraising for a vehicle for our family. This seems to be the wisest use of money as we seek to serve here in Kigali long term. Fellow missionaries have also shared the wisdom of having a quick way out of the country in the rare circumstance that we need to leave for safety reasons or if a family member needs to go to the emergency room (911 isn't exactly a thing here). ***We are looking to purchase a late 1990s model Toyota for around \$17,000. As you approach the end of the year and might be thinking about year-end giving, please keep this need in mind. If you're willing to give towards this, funds (Davenport Vehicle in the memo line) can be sent to the address on the back page.***



PRAYER REQUESTS

- Physical healing and protection of the KICS staff (malaria, typhoid, parasites, etc.)
- Spiritual and physical protection of Centre Marembo (recent break-in)



WENDY'S WANDERINGS

We've met and befriended fellow workers here that have some amazing stories. I crossed paths with an American and later learned his purpose in Rwanda. He is a Christian and a multimillionaire. He flew in on his private jet because he felt God was calling him to humble himself in the form of washing the feet of those living in poverty. That brought him to Rwanda where he does just that, washing the feet of those in the village. Another American woman was widowed 3 years ago when her husband passed away after battling cancer. He came to Christ during his illness. About a year later she moved with her 2 elementary aged children to serve and work here as a single mom, ministering to widows and orphans.

This month I joined a group of US medical staff that flew in to provide a free medical clinic in a village about an hour away. We saw 562 patients in 3 days. My primary responsibility was obtaining health histories for the physicians and nurse practitioners via a translator. It was a tough realization that the large majority of the patients had never seen a doctor before, nor had they been to an eye doctor or dentist. They had no access to over-the-counter meds that we would easily run to Walgreens for or stock in our homes. One patient was in her late 70's and her chief complaint was bone/joint pain lasting 20 years related to being severely beaten during the genocide. 20 years!! She hurts everyday due to the horrific tragedies that took place here in 1994 during the genocide.



We handed out free water at the clinic. The kids were clamoring to get their hands on a bottle.



The girls at the center learning to make and then later devouring fruit salad. Eating fruit is a rare treat.

After being part of countless births in a hospital setting in the USA, I attended my first home birth this month. I was nervous because I've seen numerous unpredictable and difficult outcomes even in a healthy pregnancy within a hospital setting in labor and delivery. Thankfully though it was a beautiful and uncomplicated delivery!

Recently, we learned of a shelter (Centre Marembo) that works with young girls and teenagers, along with their children, coming from the streets or a dysfunctional home life. The target group is girls who have suffered from neglect, abuse, abandonment, incest, and/or those who are pregnant or have disabilities. The shelter serves to rescue these girls and provide housing, education, social work services, healthcare, skill training, and emotional support. We were broken-hearted to hear their stories but also to learn that the



shelter had absolutely no spiritual aspect to their program. We approached the director about providing this and she was happy to allow us to join her work with the girls. We've loved getting to know the girls, playing together, and teaching them about the greatest love of all: their Maker. They have been so receptive and love singing, dancing and praying together.

Eric teaches about the children coming to Jesus.

Become friends with Wendy Davenport on Facebook to keep up with our family's daily life in Kigali.



BROTHER ALLIANCE

Sheldon's grandparents, aunts, and uncles wrote in with some questions for him to answer about his experiences in Rwanda so far.

What do you think about being in a new home and new country? *Great! My house is really nice and really comfortable. I like Rwanda very much and I like my new friends.*

How do you like going to school in Africa? *It's really fun to be at. I like to be with my friends, playing hide and go seek, freeze tag, and soccer.*

What's your favorite subject in school or favorite part of your day? *I like Math, computers, and science. My favorite part is playing soccer on the basketball court at recess and lunch.*

Have you learned any new games? *Thumbs up, thumbs down. And I learned a new song: the Jesus hokey-pokey.*

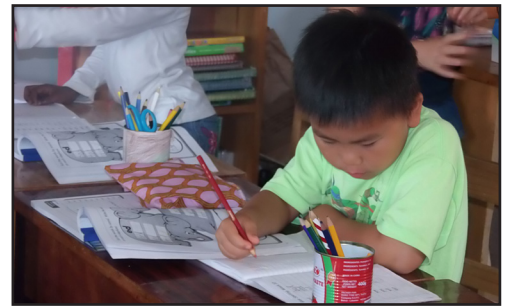
What makes you happy in your home? *Playing soccer with my brothers in the yard and spending time with my family.*

What is your favorite African food? *Roasted peanuts; peanut matoke.*

What surprised you most about Africa? *The termites in the dirt. I like to watch them and squish them. They dig holes and bang their heads on the wall.*

What do you want to say to your friends and family? *I really miss you and I'm happy to come back and spend time with you.*

Sheldon's First Grade class has 19 students representing 12 nationalities. His teacher, Mrs. Gitau, is Australian and so he comes home with all sorts of new words and expressions.





We thank you so much for your interest in our family and the work that God is doing in Kigali!

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Checks can be made out to: Sunset Ave Church of Christ

Memo line: Davenport-Vehicle

Mail to:

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