

The DIAZ Dispatch

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TADPOLES AND TRUTH

Halima was a working woman. But she did not put in an ordinary forty-hour workweek at an everyday office. She sweated through backbreaking labor in dusty fields from dawn till dusk seven days a week. The pressure of working, raising children, and trying to maintain some kind of home life were heavy, especially since she found herself trapped in a nomadic society that offered very few conveniences and even fewer rights for its women.

I was very young when I first met Halima. She was – well, I’m not exactly sure how old she was. Let’s just say that from the looks of her gnarled fingers and wrinkled brow, she was “well worn.” She was from a Fulani tribe in West Africa that herded its cattle through the “bush country” near where my dad ran his leprosy clinics.

Every week I watched as Halima came down the long, dusty path that led to our kitchen door. Her walk was tall and smooth, almost elegant. Her hips swayed rhythmically back and forth as her bare feet kicked up a little cloud of dust along the sandy trail. Her neck and head were ramrod straight, and a huge gourd filled with milk rode steadily on top.

As Halima approached, she became even more fascinating. The sun flashed off her bright fingernails, dyed red from many hours spent soaking in berry juices. She wore large tin hoops in her ears, and she had a wide, toothless grin. I always smiled “real big” at Halima so that she would have to smile back. That way I could see if she had any new gaps where she

used to have teeth. I worried about how she would eat if she lost any more.

When she arrived, Halima would sit on her haunches, chewing on bark with her few remaining teeth, while my mother measured the milk and sent it into the kitchen to be strained and boiled. I sat watching from my swing that hung low from the nearby mango tree. Halima would thank my mother for her generous payment (a few tin cans as well as a few round shillings), then she would head back down the lonely dirt path.

Over time my mother began to suspect that something was wrong with the milk. It seemed thinner than usual. Was Halima doctoring it – watering it down in order to get a few more shillings for her hard labor and her long walk? One day my mother asked her.

“No! No!” Halima protested in her native tongue. “Halima would never do that. It must be the cows. They are weak. The sun is too strong. The grass is too sparse. There is only thin milk to sell. It is all the cows have to offer!”

But the evidence proved her wrong. A few days later, three tiny tadpoles were swimming in the middle of the straining cloth. Just as my mother had suspected, Halima had been stopping at a pond on her way to our house for months. There she had filled her gourd to the top with tepid water. She had carefully tried to remove any evidence. But that day, little eggs had slipped in unnoticed and hatched as she completed her journey to our house.

That was the last time I remember seeing Halima and her toothless grin. She had cheated. Then she had lied. She had been caught. Now she was gone.

I wondered who would buy her milk. Who would watch for her down the long, winding paths of her life? Who would care about her teeth?

I soon forgot about Halima. There were plenty of other interesting characters who were more than happy to sell us milk. But I’ll always remember the lesson she taught me. No matter what the pressures are, or how easy or justifiable it seems, cheating is never worth it. Sooner or later you get caught, because sooner or later there are bound to be tadpoles flip-flopping in someone’s straining cloth.

[Gwen tells this story from her childhood in her book *Sticking Up For What is Right: Answers to the Moral Dilemmas Teenagers Face*. You can purchase the book at Amazon.com]

Never, Never, Never Give In

“Never give in, never give in, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never give in.”

These inspiring words were delivered by Winston Churchill at Harrow School, October 29, 1941. They resonate with clarity, conviction, and challenge. Those same words also apply to evangelism, especially when dealing with family and friends who are so resistant to the gospel that you feel that, humanly speaking, their “conversion” is impossible.

The story of Jesus’ encounter with the man in Matthew 19:16-26 is an example of this. This man was young (lots of life ahead of him), rich (financially independent), a leader (politically and socially connected), and he was a moral relativist (he believed entrance to heaven was based on “goodness”). When confronted with his need of salvation, he resisted and walked away from Christ to continue worshipping his real god, his wealth. The disciples then asked Jesus, “*Who then can be saved?*” Jesus replied, “***With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.***”

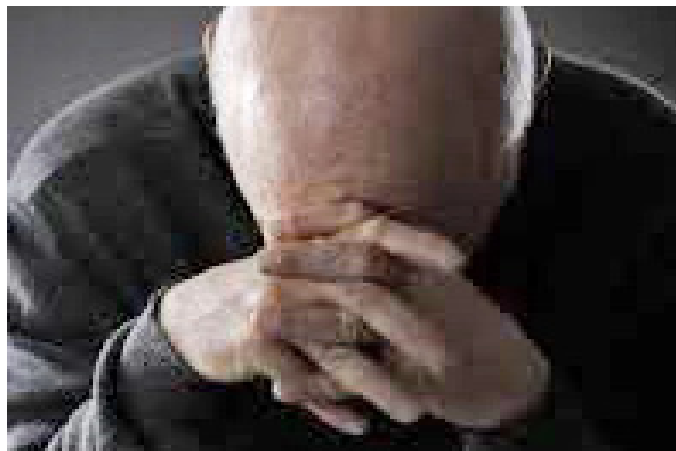
If you have a family member or friend like this, remember these four principles.

First, evangelism is a process that involves soil preparation, planting, nurturing...and this can take time. Your role in this process is not to be “successful,” but faithful.

Second, as with any process, patience is required. A bountiful harvest doesn’t take place overnight, and in evangelism the process may take years, if not a lifetime.

Third, bathe the process in prayer. Prayer is the key that can turn opposition into opportunity. Write down the names of those who seem to be far from Christ and begin praying fervently for them daily.

Finally, be sure to proclaim the message of truth. This proclamation is two-fold: With your lifestyle, as you live out the reality of Christ, and with your lips, as you seize opportunities to share the gospel. Remember, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation so “*never give in*” when reaching out to those far from Christ. “*With God all things are possible,*” including the salvation of “the impossibles.”



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Common Ground Insights

During the Korean War, the men of the First Marine Division under General Chesty Puller were surrounded on every side by invading Chinese troops at Chanjin Reservoir. Puller said to his men, “The enemy is on every side. They can’t escape!” Dwight Hill of the Navigators suggests that when you feel like the ‘enemy’ has you surrounded, God may have intentionally placed you behind enemy lines to share Christ with them.

When faced with family and friends who are disinterested or resistant about spiritual issues, you are behind enemy lines, and you need a plan. The following are suggestions for a helpful strategy for these situations.

PRAY THE GOD WILL WORK IN THEIR LIVES.

Ask God to use areas of weakness to reveal their need of Him. For example, people who are lonely may seek to relieve the loneliness through busyness. Many addictive behaviors are simply masks to hide the pain of life. Pray that they would see the futility of seeking solutions apart from Christ, the true solution.

MAKE SURE YOUR FRIENDS KNOW YOUR RELATIONSHIP IS NOT CONTINGENT ON THEIR RESPONSE TO CHRIST.

This may mean that you need to continue the relationship without bringing up spiritual topics. As you do, make it a point to spend time together developing the friendship. Be patient in earning the right to be heard.

TRY TO DO THINGS THAT BUILD MEMORIES.

Relationships that have been shared over many years build memories. Later, they may appreciate your friendship even more and be open to the gospel.

THINK THROUGH WHY YOU ENJOY THEIR FRIENDSHIP. When a friend seems indifferent toward Christ, you may want to explore why you enjoy their presence. What attracts you to them? Though you may feel some personal rejection in your friend’s spiritual disinterest, focusing on the reasons for your friendship can motivate you to hang in there.

BE AWARE THAT THIS IS A SPIRITUAL BATTLE.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that the god of this world, Satan, has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they cannot see the light of the gospel. To counter this we must pray, be patient, and trust God, for only He can change a heart.

REMEMBER... Christianity is not a fort that you leave only to share your faith and then rush back to safety. We are behind enemy lines, where God has strategically placed us to be salt and light to an unbelieving world. Strive to be a good friend to those who don’t know Christ. If you consistently display genuine friendship you may find more opportunities to share your faith than you ever imagined. And as Churchill remarked, “Never give in, never, never – in nothing great or small...” and there is no greater mission than the Great Commission!