

## Ethiopia Journal

This is an account from my trip to Ethiopia that I have been posting on Facebook. Feel free to pass it along to anyone you think would be interested. If you have already read the Facebook notes, then don't bother reading this...it is exactly the same. Hope you find this helpful and informative.

Peace, Matt

### Day 2 on the ground in Ethiopia

Today was both exhilarating and heart wrenching. I was the first one through the gate at the program site and was greeted by a beautiful group of children, all singing and waving roses. Since I was the first one through, I was designated to receive their gift of about 1.5-2 dozen roses by a precious little girl in a white princess dress who must have been about 2 or 3 years old. We listened to a presentation by the site program director and I had several kids sitting around me. A little one about 2 came up the aisle and sat on my lap for about 10 minutes and then jumped down to the next thing. When we finished that gathering and started a tour of the Child Survival Program facility, I had a little boy of about 3 attach himself to me and he held my hand as I walked around all morning. I tried to get him to play with some of the other children, but he didn't want to let go. We had lunch and then split into four groups to go on house visits to program babies. That was the part that wrecked me! We got to a house that was under construction and there were four men/boys digging a well in the courtyard. The house they lived in was very small and five people slept in a room about the size of your closet. The mother of the children wasn't there because she was taking her own mother to the clinic because she was very sick. Their aunt was taking care of them and told us that the five of them live together. The two babies cried most of the time because they were scared of all of the people and I was designated to pray for the family. I had everyone make a chain from me as I laid hands on them to pray. I barely got through the prayer. As I made my way back to the bus, what I just saw began to sink in and I started crying. I couldn't let myself really cry, because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to stop. We heard several wonderful testimonies tonight at dinner about the great work Compassion International is doing in their Leadership Development Program. The Child Survival Program helps children from prenatal through 3 years. The Child Development Through Sponsorship program helps children from 4 through the end of high school. The Leadership Development Program helps those who are identified as the best leaders to get to University and help them with college and related expenses. So, that's what we have seen so far. Tomorrow we meet our partner church and pastor and we will worship with them on Sunday morning, too.

### Day 3 on the ground in Ethiopia

Saturday, February 20, 2010 at 12:42pm

We met our partner church and pastors today. Where do I start telling about it? There is so much to share that I think my one hour Internet card will expire before I can get it all down. Let me try to share the highlights. This church is one of Compassion International's oldest Child Development through Sponsorship Programs in Ethiopia. We were greeted beautifully by the church and the project's children. They were singing and presented us all with roses. The roses are a local crop that grows in that town and are usually exported to other countries. We met their secondary students, church leadership team and the project leadership team. We toured their facilities and were treated like honored guests the whole day. We were able to pray with the women's prayer group who were spending the day praying and fasting. We learned before lunch that there is a movement among Compassion's university students and alumni to sponsor orphaned children. One of the young women who is a 2nd year university student from that church is leading the charge among the current university students and Compassion alumni to make financial contributions to help sponsor orphaned children. That time of shared prayer was very powerful! On the way to lunch, Mike Bass and I were able to take a donkey cart ride to the pastor's home where we were to eat together. That donkey was not ready for what he experienced when these two hefty boys climbed into the cart! When we first got in the cart started to move backwards!!! When we got there I am sure that I heard the donkey let out a big sigh of relief! The associate pastor who welcomed us into his home for lunch was so gracious and loving. We learned that he and his wife had taken in/adopted two grade 10 girls who were orphaned and was raising them as his own daughters. He also had his 85 year old mother living in a room behind the main house. She is bedridden and so very sweet...she couldn't stop kissing my hand when I went in to meet her. We saw how big an impact the program has in the children's lives who participate. One young man was living with his grandmother and they were both certain that he would not be going to university or able to be healthy right now if it were not for the program. The other visit we made was to a woman who was so weak from HIV/AIDS that she couldn't get out of bed for very long at a time. She had two beautiful daughters and her youngest, about 12-16 months old, was a part of the Child Survival Program. She said that the girl is HIV/AIDS free because of the project. They were both very sickly when they were selected for the program and now the girl is the picture of

## Ethiopia Journal

health and the mother is starting to get stronger. We prayed for her and when we were done, I was touched when she got up out of bed to come outside in order to take a picture. That is the best I can do right now. We will be worshiping with them tomorrow morning and will have lunch in the senior pastor's home. Oh yeah, they had Mike and I each plant a tree in their church courtyard and they said that they would be putting a name plaque by each tree with our names on them. I have a tree in Africa...how cool is that?!!

### Day 4 on the ground in Ethiopia

We went to worship with our partner church. It was amazing! We got there at 9:15 and saw the kids in their Sunday School classes. Each class we went to sang a song for us and got to ask us questions. Then we went to their chapel for worship. They have a prayer time prior to worship. The service started at 10am and was a very lively and exciting service. Their worship leader is young man who is an Elder in the church (an office held by a few church leaders) who was a Compassion program child, I think. He was in his early 20s and did an excellent job leading the prayer time and then worship. Pastor Getu's daughter found her way to my lap for much of the service. It was nice to hold a child on my lap again, since mine are older now and too big to sit on my lap any more. She is about 5 years old or so and very full of personality. The choirs all sang and were wonderful. I loved the tribal dancing that became a part of certain songs! I think Stuart got some video of me joining in on one song. The children all sat in one section across the front of the chapel from us and they all were thoroughly amused by my attempts to dance. We were brought up and given the opportunity to greet them and tell them about our church. Then they presented us with a banner that they made for us to put up in our church with their name and Compassion project on it and a picture of the church. The sermon started about 1.5 hours into the service and could have been 3 or 4 sermons. He did a great job, though. This is more of a cultural difference about length and scope than anything else. The sermon in this church is preached each week in two languages. Amharic is the national language of Ethiopia and that is the language used by the pastor. The Compassion Project Director got up when the pastor did and I thought he might be translating it to English for us because he speaks English very well. How selfish of me! He was translating the sermon into Orominga, the language spoken in that region. It is a tribal language that is spoken by many in that region and not everyone who lives there can speak both Orominga and Amharic, so they translate the sermon for them. That was pretty cool! When the pastor would pause and wait for the Oromic translation, that's when Israel would translate into English for me. Our Partnership Facilitator, Israel, was wonderful! He translated the sermon for me and was so helpful in getting our new partnership started. When I went out to use the latrine during the service, I felt like a rock star as I walked in that direction. The kids were playing outside and they all swarmed around me and were fighting for the chance to shake my hand and tell me, "Alo," and a few wanted to try out their English skills on me. As they saw that I was walking in the direction of the latrine, they all broke off from following as soon as I got within 25 yards of it. Yes, they have latrines there, not bathrooms with toilets. It is a building with four stalls on each side and you walk in and there are two concrete pads on either side of a hole about 6-8" across. The facilities in their homes were similar, only there was only one stall and it was in an out house building separated from the main home. The sermon ended with an invitation that was answered by a woman and they took her out to pray with her and counsel her on the next steps for her to take in her faith journey. The chapel was packed for worship with about 400 or so people. There were no more seats left inside and some were listening right outside the windows, which were open as there is no a/c (there were two or three ceiling fans). We went to the Senior Pastor's home for lunch and it was such an amazing spread of food! I am sure that this type of meal is only had a few times a year on special occasions and for special guests. Each meal they served a dish called Doro Wat. This meal, I was told, is served only when very special guests are coming. We left at about 2:30pm for the hotel and on the way back we stopped by the largest evangelical church in Addis Ababa. It was amazing! They have over 5000 members there and this church has planted 52 other churches in Addis! They were about to start a baptismal service while we were there and I couldn't count everyone, but I did get to over 50 before I stopped! 50 new Christians! Praise God!!! We had our debriefing meal at the hotel that night where we got to hear from each other about our worship experiences. They were all wonderful stories to hear! I continue to be blessed by how beautiful, open and welcoming these people are! What a wonderful day!

### Day 5 on the ground in Ethiopia

Not as much to report for this day. We spent the morning with the country staff in their office, worshiping together and digesting what we experienced. We talked about how to make the relationships better and what can be done in the future to ensure that these first meetings are the most helpful to establish strong partnerships between churches in the US and the churches in Ethiopia. It was a great time of sharing and very helpful. We had lunch at the King's Hotel and then went back to check out of the hotel and then go shopping. I did my part in contributing to the Ethiopian economy! We went back to the hotel and freshened up for our final dinner at an "Ethiopian Cultural

### Ethiopia Journal

Restaurant." We had more Ethiopian food and heard Ethiopian cultural music and dance. It was a great time! Then we went back to the hotel lobby to wait for 2-3 hours until the airport shuttle left to take us to the airport for our 2:35am flight out. We watched grown men play Slaps for about 45 min or so while we waited in the hotel. We got the airport at 12:20am or so and then settled in the gate area to wait for boarding. Our flight to Frankfurt, Germany was on time. Thanks to the Lufthansa pilots strike, our original flight from Frankfurt to Chicago was canceled and had to be re-booked on a United flight that left 2 hours later. That meant that our original flight from Chicago to Tampa wouldn't work and we had to re-book to a later flight that got in at 11:35pm instead of 7:25pm. We cleared customs in time to have made the original one due to it being delayed, but our bags hadn't had time to make it on board so they couldn't let us fly on the plane without our bags being on that particular flight. So we waited 4 hours at O'Hare for our other flight home. From the time we got on the shuttle to the airport in Addis to the time we landed in Tampa, it was 31 hours and about 45 minutes. I included our time in the hotel lobby waiting for the shuttle, and that added another 2 hours or so. I was so very happy to sleep in my own bed again!! I got to bed at about 1am and don't think I moved at all once I went to bed! So very glad to be home!!! It will take me a few days to recover and decompress everything from the experience. My first purchase will be an iPhone app that helps learn Amharic, then a book to supplement.