

Missionary Lily Field

From Tears to Joy in Jesus

Scripture Readings: Genesis 12:2, Psalm 126:5&6 and Philippians 3:7-11



Five-year-old Lily again heard the song, *We are the World*, on the school bus. It always brought her to tears when she heard the line, “There are children dying, it’s time to take a stand.” The line evoked the images she saw on television of starving Ethiopian children dying due to famine. She walked home and asked her mother, “Why are there children dying?” Her mother began to answer her with a response that didn’t seem to answer her question: “Lily, that’s why you have two parents, that’s why you have shoes to wear, that’s why you get to go to school. Most children in the world don’t have those things, but God blessed you with them so that you can grow up and be a blessing, so children don’t die. And if you don’t learn and help others, children will continue to die.” Before Lily ever heard about and accepted the American dream, a new ideology had just been sown in her young heart—God was blessing her, not for her to be safe and comfortable, secure, and happy, but so He could use her to help all the others in the world who didn’t have access to what she had.

Neither Lily nor her mother yet fully understood that God’s heart—a soft, tender spot for starving orphans—was planted in Lily and was being watered by her mother. Over the years Lily’s love for Jesus and people grew, as well as her call to missions and to the people of Africa.

In 2003, after graduating as a Nurse-Midwife and Family Nurse Practitioner, Lily moved to Northern Haiti where she served as a medical missionary in an orphanage for critically ill and abandoned children. She was a mother to 70 orphan children, and her mission was to make disciples of Jesus Christ that would spread the gospel throughout the world. She sowed the word of God into the hearts of her children and the Haitian people, but it seemed she watered those seeds with tears. There was much to weep about on this missionary journey: the heartbreak of burying beloved children who died of AIDS, death threats, poisonings, violence, and poverty. Most people saw Lily as strong and brave and courageous; but her dearest Haitian prayer partner and friend, tower of strength & consistency and surrogate mother said, “I’ve never seen someone cry so much.” Lily responded, “That’s because you see me in prayer. I’m naked before God since He already knows my heart. I lay it all before Him and release my fears, pain, and frustration and then find strength to get up and keep fighting.” The promise in Psalm 126:5&6 encouraged her along the way: those who sow in tears, SHALL reap in joy.

After nine incredibly difficult, yet love-filled years mothering, nursing, and ministering in Haiti, God called Lily out to minister to Muslim people. Lily could not imagine walking out of the lives of the children she felt were hers, with whom—like any mother—she wanted to stay until death. Knowing that they wouldn't be able to grasp that they weren't being abandoned again, but rather were being separated from her for the expansion of God's kingdom, increased Lily's pain. Leaving that mission field behind was harder than leaving family to go to it, and Lily descended into deep grief, weeping, and pain for a season.

While seeking God for His next steps for her, Lily began ministering to Muslim women from Saudi Arabia who were in the US as international students. One of the women, Khasaf, * who had come to study English with the real agenda of finding answers to her life quest of knowing who Jesus and God truly were, was learning much about Jesus. Having started reading the Bible, she met Lily for coffee at Starbucks in the center of a mall and asked, "Lily, what has it cost you to follow Jesus?" Lily wanted to give a good "Christian" answer and talk about the joy of following the Lord, but the raw wounds of forsaking her Haitian children for Muslim people meant she was continually going forth weeping as she sowed the gospel into Khasaf's life. The floodgates of her broken heart opened up, and she began to recount all that it had cost her to follow Jesus: the loss of health (having suffered malaria, dengue, and hepatitis), the loss of security (being attacked at gunpoint, put on a kidnapping list, poisoned), the loss of wealth & comfort (living nine years without running water or power), the loss of friends & family (both biological and God-given children). Inside Lily wanted to close the floodgates; she didn't want to scare Khasaf from accepting Christ by presenting the reality of suffering for Jesus. Looking to wrap it up, she ended by saying, "It's cost me a lot, it's cost me everything to follow Jesus. But I would do it all over again today if given a chance without shedding a tear because everything I've lost; I count as nothing for the privilege of what I've gained—the joy of knowing Jesus through the fellowship of His suffering. Khasaf looked at her and said, "You know that helps. A white missionary told me God had blessed them with a great life as a Christian in America and that did not help. Lily look at me. I am Saudi! If I accept your Jesus, I will not just have a nice, blessed life. I will suffer, that is if I live, if my father and brother don't kill me before the government does, for apostasy. But to know that you've suffered something, and Jesus is WORTH it: That helps!"

Lily continued to minister with Muslim international students for the next three years before moving back home to the DC area where she grew up. She reconnected with Ambassadors Fellowship (AFI), one of the only African American missions sending agencies devoted to sending long term missionaries to unreached nations. After serving with them for four years, she became the Executive Director of AFI in 2019 and now spends her life raising up and training missionaries of color to raise up disciple-makers in the unreached nations of the world. Lily rejoices in seeing children from the orphanage join her in ministry and pursue a call for missions to the unreached.

What is it costing you to follow Jesus now? Do you tend to run away from ministry that seems too costly, too painful, that brings tears? Can you believe in faith today that Jesus is worth it, and the result will be a great harvest (sheaves) of men and women living for Jesus?

Remember the promise Lily embraced, "Those who sow in tears, shall reap in joy."

*Name changed for security.