

30 DAYS PRAYER FOR HOPE



Join us for 30 days as we pray for orphans
and vulnerable children, not only in Brazil,
but also around the world.

30 DAYS *of*
PRAYER FOR HOPE

Day 1: Introduction

Okay, I'll admit it: I have never been one to sit still and pray for great lengths of time. But there have been times when I have known that I really do need to fall on my knees and feel His presence—when I need to reach out, to beg others to pray with me, *for* me, for our children. *All* of them! This is one of those times.

For the next 30 days, we are asking you, our partners, to take a moment and read these petitions for prayer from the campuses of the City of Youth and Hope Mountain. You are our friends, loved ones, partners, and many of you have been investing in these lives for years. If *you* don't pray, who will?

Most of these reflections were written by Corenne Smith, my wife, who experienced each story first-hand alongside our Brazilian teammates. As she writes,

Until three weeks ago, Philip and I were living on the Hope Mountain campus with Marc and Isabel-la, our dog and all of the Hope boys and house parents. It was life in community with all the intrusive closeness of being part of an extremely extended family. But last month, we left for the United States for a period of one year, so that our children could attend school in English.

Oh, how I long to hear Bernardo knocking at my door requesting new batteries for the game controller; or the “air raid alarm” signaling it's dinner time. There was always something urgent to do. I always felt indispensable; but for the next nine months we will be mostly in the United States with Phil going back and forth. Now what?

Being unplugged for a season, I realize that perhaps I have more faith in myself than I do in God's sovereignty. All I can do is pray. I pray fervently for Alex, 18, who like me just left the security of Hope Mountain. I pray for Joao Carlos who is starting his first internship at a bakery, and for Eduardo who willingly entered re-hab.

I pray, because after 29 years in ministry, there is one thing we know: God expects us to pray, and He answers our prayers.

We ask that you join the entire Hope family in prayerful supplication for each day's request.

Sincerely,



Philip Smith, CEO and co-founder
For the entire Hope team

Today, we pray for the hundreds of thousands of suffering children, like those highlighted on these pages, whose childhood and humanity are being stolen right this second. Little ones who are considered objects instead of human beings. We pray that we will never become calloused and forget about them.

Day 2: Nayana And Miuki

Today, Lord, we lift up all of our young married graduates, who didn't have the model of a Christian family, but found a family with each other and are raising a new generation of Christ followers. Specifically, we pray for Nayana as she starts her life with Brian, and for Miuki as she continues to raise her children in the way they should go.

Today is Nayana's wedding day! And Miuki will be standing by her side!

Nayana was our very first girl graduate. She later came to the US to attend university and met the love of her life here. Miuki graduated right after her, married, and had 2 kids. When she learned that her father was in Japan, dying, she immigrated to Japan and cared for him until he passed away. She then sent for her husband, children and brother.

This is unbelievable on so many levels: first, that two former street kids from Brazil are living on two different continents and second, that Miuki is going to stand up for Nayana. As kids, these two redefined sibling rivalry! Miuki was cool, popular among the kids, always dressed perfectly, and crafty. Nayana was the perfect kid; but she was innocent and gullible and spent many nights crying in frustration over Miuki's antics.

Both experienced childhood trauma before coming to Hope. Miuki and her brother Tomoyaki (our only Asian students) were dropped off by their father, who said if they returned he would kill himself. Nayana suffered greatly before finally being orphaned, and came to Hope after running away from a cruel aunt.

At perhaps this very moment, as Phil walks Nayana down the aisle and I sit in the front pew as mother of the bride, and as our daughter Bella drops those flower petals down the aisle, we will be rejoicing. I am so proud of these two girls and the bond they share. We are a family. Our roots are deep and strong.

As I write this, the wedding hasn't happened, but it's happening today! By tomorrow we should have photos and perhaps even video of the grand occasion. We will be sure to post them on our [Facebook page!](#)

*Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.
Psalm 82:3*



Nayana at college graduation; Miuki and her family

During all this time, he was never able to hold a steady job. He lived for a while with his sister who tried to help him, to no avail. This time I sent him to a rehab center. Sometimes I ask myself, is it really worth it? Is there any chance he will recuperate and make something of his life?

Day 3: Danilo, Through Ricardo's Eyes

And then I remember. The place I work is called Hope *Unlimited*.

Father, today we pray for perseverance and a peace that passes all understanding, not only for our staff, but all those that work with this very special population of abandoned and orphaned children.

Attempting to capsuleize our kids' lives into 300 hundred words can never adequately describe the challenges. Years of struggles get

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. This text from Galatians is perfect for the fridge of anyone in ministry with kids. Anyone with kids, for that matter.

Below is an excerpt from a letter from one of our vocational instructors, Ricardo, written from the depths of his heart.

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

One day on my way to work, I ran across a 10-year-old boy in the bus station. It was a cold morning, and that young boy, barely dressed and curled up in the cold, caught my attention. I invited him to come with me to the City of Youth. At first he was a little scared, but he saw the other staff members boarding the bus with me and decided to come. He stayed at the City of Youth for quite a while, and went through several vocational courses. Danilo was even the ring-bearer in my wedding!



Danilo through Ricardo's eyes

Sixteen years have passed since then, and many things have happened. The little boy named Danilo became a man. Now 26 years old, it seems like everything is repeating itself. Once again, he is looking to us for help. It must be the fourth or fifth time. I have taken him to more than one rehabilitation center, and I even visited him when he was arrested for robbery.

During all this time, he was never able to hold a steady job. He lived for a while with his sister who tried to help him, to no avail. This time I sent him to a rehab center. Sometimes I ask myself, is it really worth it? Is there any chance he will recuperate and make something of his life?

And then I remember. The place I work is called Hope *Unlimited*.

Attempting to capsuleize our kids' lives into 300 hundred words can never adequately describe the challenges. Years of struggles get left on the editing room floor. And yes, even our amazing our house parents can burn out. They have moments when they wonder if it is all worth it. That's why they need to post this verse—not only on their fridges, but on their hearts:

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.
Galatians 6:9

Day 4: The Road

Lord, today we pray for safety. We ask for your angels to protect our staff and our children. We live in a sinful world, where there is a constant battle being waged between good and evil. Thank you that our staff doesn't let fear grip their hearts. Thank you that they come to work each day. Lord, please help us find a way to protect our access road, to make their trips to and from work safe.

The Road that leads to Hope is a beautiful dirt road lined with trees and even a white picket fence for a distance of mile. But the road is actually very dangerous, making our City of Youth arrivals and departures stressful. Here are just a few of the things that have happened:

- Social workers Simone and Maria Elise were kidnapped in their own car leaving work. They were held under a bridge until Pastor Derli found them, and their captors fled on foot.
- Alex and Dayane were kidnapped on their way to work and held in a nearby house with bags over their heads. Julio, our maintenance chief, called on some former drug dealers who had come through our program and fearlessly freed them.
- At one point, bandits came onto the Hope campus and sequestered the administrative staff while they ransacked the office and made off with an employee's car.
- Adriana, our social worker, has been stopped twice. One time, coming down the road with her husband and son, a bandit forced her to the ground with his foot between her shoulder blades.

The stories go on and on—altogether our staff have had more than 30 vehicles stolen over the years. Fortunately, none of our staff have ever been injured or killed. We've asked the government to pave the road to add protection. We've thought about installing cameras for the entire mile—but if the copper phone lines are always stolen, how long do you think the cameras will last?

These are terribly frightening events. But motivated by their passion for Christ and reckless love for the children, in the spirit of true missionaries, the risks can't deter these warriors from being faithful to *His* call.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1

Day 5: Geraldo

God, we pray for Geraldo and all who have left our program with the Seed of the Gospel planted in their hearts, whether they completed the program or not. We pray that that seed would take root and flourish in the life of each alumni, and that they will be ambassadors for God to their families, peers, and communities.

Geraldo, 21, recently posted this:

The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that you're loved not because of who you are, but despite who you are.

Geraldo's "got it all!" He's loved by his wife and his daughter; he's proud of his job as a baker; he's made his in-laws' home into a duplex, adopting them as his own parents so that both families can economize.

I can actually smell the fresh, sweet, hot baked bread from the photos he posts. For the past three years, he's worked six days a week at the bakery, rising at 4 am each day to catch the bus to his shift, making it difficult to join his family at church.



Geraldo with his wife

Geraldo wouldn't be one of our statistical "success" stories. He fell in love while he still had a few months to go in the program and left to be with his girlfriend. We all tried to talk him out of leaving the program before graduating. Who would ever advise a 17-year-old orphan to follow his heart? But at least he left having acquired a vocational skill in baking.

Geraldo remains close to us; we are still his family. My prayer for him is that we can find a way to help him take some advanced courses and move on to the next level of professionalism—perhaps something that gives him more time with his family and Sundays off for worship. I am praying, and he is too, about someday coming back to Hope as a bakery instructor.

Our ministry can't be measured in weeks or even months. It is a generational ministry and it may be decades before you see the fruit of your labor.

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
Proverbs 22:6

Day 6: Kintsugi—Brokenness Restored

Lord, there is so much brokenness in our world. Today we pray about HOW you would have us minister to brokenness and all of its fall-out, especially orphans. Please give us direction as to how you want our time and talent to be used for your glory, and how we can inspire others to serve this cause.

The following excerpt is from a mission team report, following a visit to our campus in Brazil:

Kintsugi is an ancient Japanese art form which takes broken vases and fills the cracks with gold. What was once considered worthless becomes a priceless work of art. God does the same for us. Whatever brokenness we have faced in this life, God can fill us with His gold and transform us into a priceless work for His glory.”

During our visit to Hope in Brazil, Pastor James Chang shared this message during chapel. Kintsugi became a powerful visual to represent the miraculous work of restoration that our team was seeing in the lives of the students. Phil Smith considered it so meaningful, he asked his art teacher to work with our team and create a wall mural in the center of the campus.

Here is what this mural signifies to me: Phil and Corenne Smith aren’t just looking for tourists, they are looking for friends. I still remember arriving at the airport and Corenne looked at us with tears and said: “Finally, you came.” I still remember struggling to finish our on-campus painting project before we had to leave for the women’s prison and hearing, “You know, this is deeper than the work projects.” I still remember leaving for the airport, and Phil suddenly appearing with large Mango and Graviola smoothies to share with us. This was not about going to a foreign land with foreign people and foreign mosquitos; this was visiting family. This was brothers and sisters sharing in the good work of the kingdom of God and taking great joy in it together.

Essentially, they wanted our hearts to break for things that broke theirs, and for us to take joy in the things that they rejoiced in. For all the things we did as a Gardena Valley Baptist Church team in Brazil, it was this friendship in ministry that brought us the deepest joy.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4



The team with their Kintsugi vase mural

Day 7: Joice

Father, what grips our heart today is not only Joice, but all of our kids—girls and boys—who have been victims of sexual abuse. The damage is done. It takes years to unravel, and it is only through the transformational power of the Cross that freedom is found.

As a teen, Joice was beautiful, fun, high strung, and *extremely* emotional. She cried easily, but laughed easily too. No one really knew her story. It is only now, as an adult, who has experienced marriage, motherhood, and served as a house parent, that she is beginning to put the pieces of her past together.

She was 10 when she learned the big “secret.” It was when she confided in her mother that her uncle had tried to abuse her, who yelled in a rage, “You’re just like your mother!” Joice was confused. “What do you mean? Aren’t *you* my mother?”



Joice with her boys

As she unraveled the pieces, she found out that her father had abused her older step-sister... and that her step-sister was her real mother. She had so many questions: “Is that why my mother/grandmother was always so cold to me? How can my father be so good to me and have done something so awful to my sister?”

Shortly after this incident, the lady she had thought was her mother dropped her off at an orphanage. Joice kept running away, until finally, social workers took her to a place in a distant city that they thought she might stay: the City of Youth.

“When I came to the City of Youth, I didn’t want to be here,” she says. “Having someone ask ‘How was your day?’ seemed weird. But after I became a mother, I understood how those caring touches had made a difference in my life.”

Last year, Joice’s sister/mother committed suicide. Although her questions remain unanswered, she is grateful to God that she found a place where she was loved, and where she and her husband Jorge are now raising their two precious boys.

We struggle when sharing our kids’ stories, particularly those of abuse. How do we find the balance between sharing with our partners and not being exploitive, sensationalist, manipulative?

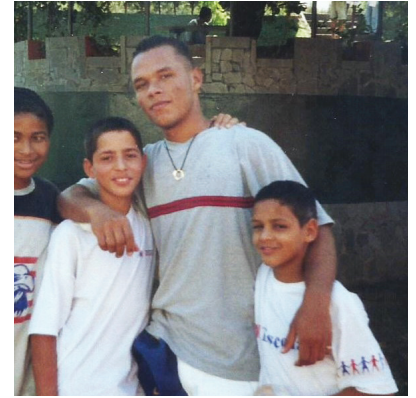
Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities. Lamentations 5:7

Day 8: Jorge And His Mother, Part 1

Lord, please comfort the millions of children who have been abandoned by their parents, and help them find peace and a place in their hearts to forgive. Comfort too their parents, who often suffer with tremendous guilt for the sins of their past.

What if you found out that your real mother was a prostitute and had abandoned you?

Jorge was always very withdrawn and pensive. He continually asked our social workers for information about his mother. Our head social worker, Adriana, could find nothing out, but didn't give up. One day she finally had a breakthrough: she discovered that his mother was in Rio de Janeiro, living in one of the most dangerous, dirty slums. It was well known that not even the police ventured in. Nevertheless, she decided that she needed to take Jorge there.



Jorge, center, with friends

One morning, Jorge set out with Adriana, our psychologist, and a driver for the six hour drive. When they arrived, a municipal social worker led them the rest of the way. Driving down a maze of small streets, Adriana asked Jorge if he was sure this is what he wanted, and told him to expect the worst. He was undeterred.

Arriving in front of a rickety plywood wall, the social worker told them to go through a small opening (she herself would not go). They found an huge field of half-constructed dwellings, made from pieces of cardboard, tin, and plywood. The stench and squalor was so bad that our psychologist vomited and had to turn back.

(To be continued tomorrow)

*Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.
Deuteronomy 5:16*

Day 9: Jorge And His Mother, Part 2

(Continued from yesterday)

(Yesterday, we read about a withdrawn little boy name Jorge, who had been abandoned as an infant by his mother, who he yearned to find. Our social workers finally located her in a dangerous slum in Rio de Janeiro, where our story takes up...)

Seeking information from drugged residents, they finally found his mother lying on a mat, emaciated and full of sores, with morsels of rotting food around her. His mother was dying of AIDS. Jorge rushed forward to hold her, and Adriana explained to the half-conscious lady who he was.

Jorge was a big boy. He gathered his mother up, and they walked the maze of filthy streets for the last time. With the help of the local social worker, they checked her in to a public hospital. As she lay on the clean sheets, Jorge sat down beside her. He didn't question her. He just looked into his mother's eyes and said that he forgave her for leaving. He didn't need to know why she had left. He just needed to release her. In that act of forgiveness, he was released as well.

Two weeks later, Adriana learned that Jorge's mother had died. She worried about how to break the news to him. But when he heard, he was OK. He knew that he mother was at peace, so he was too. He had finally been liberated from his pain. From that moment forward, he was no longer withdrawn, and he became energetic and full of promise.

God, it is so easy to mutter the prayer in church Forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. But today, we pray for all of our kids (and for ourselves) to be able to truly let go of transgressions. To know the freedom of giving it all to you. So many times, we have seen how these children have ministered to others, showing us how petty our own gripes are. Please Lord, help us to learn how to forgive.



Jorge, center, with friends

Day 10: Marconi

Father, please be with Marconi. Please enable him to lose 50 more pounds so he can have surgery. Be with the doctors who will perform his operation. We know with you, all things are possible.

Marconi is at least 300 lbs. His voice is deep, and he's a bit gruff. He is the well-respected head of maintenance and transportation at the Hope Mountain campus. His mother abandoned the family of six kids. His father's life was in the underworld, and he was tortured and killed in front of his kids. But the nightmare had just begun.

"I remember the date, September 13, 1999, as if it were yesterday. It was the worst day of my life. It was the day they shoved me, my brother, and my five sisters into a van. Each time the van stopped, they dropped off another one of my siblings, as if they were puppies. Each time I lost one more piece of my heart. I was the last one to be dropped off. At 11, I was the oldest. And I had failed to keep my family together."



Marconi with his family

Hope Mountain had just opened with a handful of boys, and Marconi was one of the first. One day he announced that he was running away to find his little brother, who was a deaf mute. We explained the laws regarding having a six-year-old on the campus. But in order to keep Marconi, we would have to find a way to bring "Muffin Head." We did. Eighteen years later, his special-needs brother, always with a smile on his face, still comes to the campus with Marconi every single day.

Marconi always had one dream: to reunite his family. He was finally able to achieve that dream: he built a home for himself and "Muffin Head" which has quarters behind his house for his siblings. He wants to be sure they will never be homeless or separated again.

Marconi is getting married in December to his fiancé, Flavia, who works in finance at Hope Mountain. But he has some serious medical issues requiring surgery. Unfortunately, he has to lose a lot of weight first.

Today's prayer is a current and urgent prayer request. As I write this, Marconi has lost 20 kilos, but still has 30 more to go so before he can undergo surgery. If you want to leave him a note of encouragement, you can post it on our [Facebook page](#) today. What better wedding present than knowing a body of believers is praying for his successful weight loss and surgery? He believes in the power of prayer—God answered his in re-uniting his family.

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:8

Day 11: Mara And The Board

Father, we lift up each one of our Board Members. They give, struggle through issues, volunteer countless hours, and keep us covered in the shield of prayer despite their own issues at work, in their families, with their health. We are so thankful for them.

Two years ago Mara, the backbone of Hope Unlimited's operations in Brazil, confided in me that at one point, in the midst of an unwanted divorce, she felt worthless. She actually contemplated ending it all. Who knew? I surely didn't!

That week, the Board of Directors for Hope Unlimited happened to be meeting in Brazil, as they do every two years. During the visit, Pastor Amos led the directors in washing the feet of the Brazilian staff. Burt McDowell, a highly respected medical doctor, knelt and washed Mara's feet—unknowingly washing away her pain. In that moment, Mara felt valued, and her feeling of shame and unworthiness was lifted, never to return. She felt part of something larger than herself. She felt loved.



The Foot-Washing Board of Directors

Washing feet. Such a simple task that speaks volumes. It is a physical expression that humbles the heart and touches the receiver. I am so grateful for the Hope Unlimited Board who serve with servant's hearts.

*If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.
John 1:14*

Day 12: Graduate Church

Lord, we know people in our own congregations are struggling with the issues mentioned below, so we pray for the church in Brazil as well as our own churches, as we try to keep our youth connected to the body of Christ. We also ask for miraculous healing for Maurila. Please use her illness to strengthen the faith of Hope graduates.

I wrote this today because Pastor Derli has requested prayer for our church. We never thought we'd plant a church. We already have a church within the City of Youth that is the center of our work, the melting pot of friendships, emotions, spiritual growth, and—as you know if you've been there—much enthusiasm.

After our kids graduated, some found local churches and immediately became contributing members of the congregation. Some of them . . . but not all. Others became discouraged and dropped out. Some had found themselves sitting in the back pew of large churches, feeling they had nothing to offer, having occupied leadership roles at the City of Youth church. Still others, whether real or imagined, felt they were branded “street kids.” The feeling was, “Your story is so beautiful! But you're not going to date my daughter...”

Rather than see our graduates leave the church, we started our own. Today our Graduate Church has its own building, with an indoor gym, bleachers, and snack bar. It reaches not only our grown kids and their families (Sunday Schools are full!) but has members who come from the community. Best of all, the worship is led by graduates!

Pastor Derli asks us to join him in praying that our graduates will always have the confidence to openly profess their faith. The current political atmosphere mocks Christianity as a crutch, and our graduates have expressed feeling embarrassed admitting they were Christians.

He also asks for prayer for a lady named Maurila, a neighbor from the community nearby who visited the church. She accepted Christ and formally joined the graduate church. Tragically, she has been diagnosed with intestinal cancer. It is heartbreaking for all of our graduates who are fervently praying for her.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Romans 1:16

Day 13: Jose Nilton, Part 1

Father, we pray for all the children still languishing on the streets, with the same potential as Jose, who have not yet encountered hope.

Philip was invited to a state congress for auto body repair shops to make a presentation about Hope's auto body course. Worrying about taking their precious time, he briefly described the youth we take in and thanked anyone there that had given our graduates jobs. As he spoke, a man in the back stuck his hand up, his 5 fingers curiously spread.

When Phil finally called on him, he said, "Five!" He then went on to say, "I have *five* employees who came from Hope Mountain. They are among my best professionals." Other body shop owners jumped in sharing similar stories of graduates they had hired. One, from a Renault dealership, had hired fifteen, saying "Several have now been able to purchase their own homes." How gratifying is that!

Truly loving a child means not just sharing about eternal life, but striving to ensure a bright and productive futures during their lifetimes. That's where Hope's vocational training comes in—a critical element in giving a child hope.

This link is to [Jose Nilton](#) one of our first graduates. Jose is one of those 15 employees working at that Renault dealership as an auto body repair specialist. He shares what life was like after his father was murdered. "I was five when I took to the streets," he explains. He talks of starting out as a "vapor," an expression for little kids used by drug traffickers as look outs for police, who then "evaporate" into thin air. His voice cracks as he points toward heaven and says, "If it weren't first for God, and secondly for Hope Mountain, I would be dead."

I won't give it all away, but it's worth three minutes of your time. I trust it will compel you to pray... particularly for all of the Jose's still out there who have not yet encountered hope.

(Tomorrow, Jose shares more about his life after accepting Christ)

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Romans 5:6

Day 14: Jose Nilton, Part 2

Lord, help each of us, with every breath, to use all the resources you have given us—a good home, an education, a job—to make a difference to those who have less. Help us to never feel justified in our wealth.

“You see, you had no choice which day you would be born... would your mind be strong, would your eyes be blue or brown, whether daddy would be rich, or if momma stuck around at all. So if ya find yourself in a better place, you can’t look down on the other guy’s face, you gotta stoop down low, look him square in the eye... cause you just might be dealing with the face of Christ.”

-Chris Rice, singer

These words came hauntingly back to me as I watched Jose struggle to keep his composure talking about his tiny daughter and the asthma that almost took her from them. Not having health insurance had a huge part to do with this story, which wrecked me completely, because our daughter Bella had been in ICU more times than I can count... but always had the best healthcare possible.

Today’s [video](#) shows Jose talking about the power of prayer, fasting, church community and the life of a little girl. The biggest take-away is this graduate’s continued dependence on prayer and God’s faithfulness in answering those prayers.

I can’t help but take Luke seriously, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be expected...” I don’t know why I was born with so much. But I do know that with it comes responsibility. I am thankful for the blessing of being part of Jose’s life.

Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required. Luke 12:48

Day 15: Prayer Garden

God, we thank you for your provision—for the beauty of the earth and for the local community of believers that come and pray for us in our own prayer garden, raising their petitions to the Lord. Today, we add our voices to all the prayers which have emanated from this special place.

There is a secret hidden behind the soccer field at Hope Mountain. If you push back the leaves you will see a little trail, and if you dare to irritate the monkeys and parrots hiding in the overgrowth of vines and banana trees, you will come to a small clearing—a very rustic prayer garden.

For years we have used this spot for retreats with the boys—all-night prayer vigils that help them to forget themselves and focus on the Lord.

One night Philip was working past midnight in his office and was startled to see a steady stream of people creeping across the soccer field. He jumped to his feet and engaged the intruders, only to find a pastor from one of the small local churches with several members of his congregation going to our prayer garden! At midnight?

He learned that they came there at midnight, once a month, to pray for the Hope Mountain ministry and all the boys. Philip found out that theirs was not the only congregation in the community that used this sacred space on a regular basis.

Inspired, Phil asked a local church to bring a chain saw and a team to put in rows of log benches and clean up the area a bit, leaving it rustic but more user-friendly. Phil even thought about footlights to help guide them, but our boys informed him there was no need. At night the overbrush glows and illuminates the path naturally.

A bit doubtful, I called my biologist brother, who informed me certain plants and fungi do have bioluminescent properties. Imagine! The Light of the World guiding our children's feet with bioluminescent trees!

God has given us such a beautiful sanctuary to raise our Hope kids. There is no place more majestic, more serene, and so removed from the disorganization, filth, and confusion of the hovels where they lived before.

Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day. 1 Kings 8:28



Worshiping in the prayer garden

Day 16: Officer Elvis

Father, we pray for Elvis and all of the graduates who have gone into law enforcement. We know the important role that police officers play in the lives of vulnerable children. While some have perpetrated terrible abuses, many are the first caring adults that our children encounter. Thank you, Father, for all those anointed to wear the badge.

He lived in Itatinga, the dangerous red light district of Campinas, where his mother worked the streets. He got into some trouble and for his safety, was sent to us. He accepted Christ, learned the guitar, and after graduating, returned to play for the worship team at the graduate church. He was one of the first alumni to bring his mother and little brothers to the graduate church with him.

Elvis is now a police officer, covering the beat that includes City of Youth. He is married, a father, and plays the saxophone in his own praise band. He is always the first one we call when something happens on our road. I am so proud of the compassion he has for those he confronts on a daily basis, loving the sinner, while hating the sin.



Elvis in uniform

I often wonder what would have happened to Elvis had he not been snatched out of the brothel and transported to the City of Youth. He was among those under “protective custody” and not allowed to be photographed or leave the campus much. As he got older, we let down our guard, and he started to ride the bus to his internship, but one day was confronted by a member of the gang who was out to get him. We had to cancel his internship. He never revolted, always knowing that God had a calling for him.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. Genesis 50:20

Day 17: Bread, Basket, And A Bicycle

Lord, please be with the Santos family and their new business venture. Please guard their bike from being stolen and protect them from assault as they sell their goods. We also thank you for the instructors, who commute long distances and give of their time and expertise, seeking to impact families for Jesus.

What does it mean to be in community? Every day, 400 young people form the community board our buses bound for our campus (half in the morning, and have in the afternoon). When they arrive, they hold hands in a huuuge circle, and start the day in a short reflection and prayer for the day. Then they're off to their coursework that will lead to their receiving certificates and an opportunity at job placement. Every Wednesday during chapel, the community can stop, take a breath and be ministered to.

What was meant to train vulnerable youth for employment has turned into a multi-generational ministry. Unemployed parents see their kids getting jobs and ask for a chance to participate in our courses and acquire a skill for the first time.

This was the case for the Santos family. Shelia, the daughter, was pregnant. Her mother and father were both unemployed. All three enrolled together in our bakery course. Upon graduation, we helped them put together resumes and set up some interviews.

They opted instead to buy a bicycle with a basket and a bell, using their new skills to bake bread to sell to their neighbors. With the new income, they were able to leave their shack in the slum, and rent a better apartment in preparation for the baby. So far, so good!

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

Day 18: Clayton

Father, today we lift up all of our current students. We ask that you will help us nurture the next generation of Claytons.

Clayton is a robotic engineer with Toyota. More importantly, he is a loyal husband, father, and Sunday school teacher.

As a child, his mother made him sell candy on the streets. His brother would steal and cheat to increase his profit margin, but little Clayton would not. When he came home with less money, his mom would grab his hair and beat his head against the wall. Finally, Clayton ran away.

During his years with us he accepted Christ, taught himself to speak English, and won a scholarship to a private high school. He turned down the chance to study in the USA because he was dating at the time. "My dream is for a family, not to live in the U.S." he shyly told me, embarrassed to be turning the opportunity down.



Clayton, 15, from 1993

After he graduated from engineering school, his mother reached out to him, even though she'd had no contact with him until he was an income-earning adult. He felt it was his responsibility to take her in. It didn't go well. When he was away on a business trip, she sold most of his belongings. Even so, Clayton continued to send her money after she moved out.

Clayton realized his dream. I walked down the aisle with him, standing in as his "mom" on his wedding day. Our son Marc was his ring bearer. Clayton built a beautiful home in a neighborhood near the City of Youth, and has a gorgeous wife and daughter. His wife plans to buy the lot next to their house and build a neighborhood learning center.

Clayton faithfully calls to check on me. Two months ago he showed another act of loyalty. He opened the doors at Toyota, where he has been an engineer for the past 10 years, to give the Hope Unlimited City of Youth a grant of \$30,000 Reais.

Today I am thankful for Clayton and so proud of all that he has become. I think about those other freckle-faced, shy kids entering our doors, and I can't wait to see what blessings are in store for them in the next decade.

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments...Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Proverbs 3:1,3

Day 19: Golberi

God, protect the Golberi's that are on the street tonight. We urgently plead that Hope staff will find them, or that they will find their way to Hope.

"I never dreamed Uncle Philip's daughter and my own daughter would be best friends," Golberi says stoically, ignoring the tears streaming down his face. Who would have? But that's what happens. Children grow up to be peers, and eventually the roles reverse and they become the caretakers.

Phil met Golberi was about 8. He was sleeping on the sidewalk on a piece of cardboard, not far from the entrance of Philip's first apartment in Brazil. Philip had only been in Brazil for a matter of weeks and did not speak Portuguese yet, but he befriended Golberi and would buy him snacks.



Golberi's family with the Smiths

One day, Philip invited Golberi to come through the front doors of a fancy restaurant for a real meal. It was an incident which marked him forever. Click on this [link](#) to hear a 3-minute video of Golberi recounting this incident, along with a few details of his incredible life. His narration involves murder, love, humor and intrigue, all without the special effects of Hollywood!

Twenty-nine years later, I feel like the roles have reversed. Golberi has been transformed into a middle-aged man of God, carrying my burdens, and caring about Philip and my family in a host of ways. Being part of the extended family of Christ is a beautiful thing!

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:27

Day 20: Rhay

Father, today we have joy in our hearts. Pure thankfulness for the transformation that comes with accepting Christ. Thank you for your provision for each of our children like Rhay. Thank you for giving them the opportunity to choose to follow you and know what it means feel the joy of serving Christ with their lives.

“This kid had “attitude.” He was tough, he had a temper, he didn’t like adults, and he didn’t like authority. His mother was dead, and his dad was a drug dealer. One particularly rebellious day he announced he was running away. Bruno, our gentle giant, wrapped his arms around this furious kid and held on tightly, lovingly repeating, “You are not running away. This is your home, and we love you.” until finally, exhausted, the boy started to cry.

Rhay accepted Christ. From that moment on he had a joy and a changed attitude that was palpable. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” But not all change happens overnight, and Rhay still had a habit of stealing from the other boys.

So Bruno asked him if he would consider the baptism class and becoming a junior house leader. Rhay took this responsibility seriously. The first thing he did was to bring in a big bag and place it on the table. Inside was every little stick of gum, T-shirt, or cologne that he had taken from anyone. One by one, he returned them and asked for forgiveness. “I wanted to model what it was to be a good person,” he said.

Today Rhay is 19 and lives close to the Mountain. At his job converting vehicles to run on propane, he has been promoted three times. He comes back to church at the Campus on the weekends and asks for nothing. As soon as he had his own apartment, he sent for his twin sister, who was living with an impoverished aunt in a distant city, so that she could live with him and take courses at the Mountain. He also opened his door to one of our other graduates who moved back into the area.

Rhay no longer takes, he only gives.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:3,6

Day 21: Alex

*Thank you Lord, with all my heart, for hearing our prayers, and answering them all, in your time.
Give us the patience to wait and to recognize the miracles when they happen.*

A gentle giant. That's the best way I can describe Alex. Probably 6'3" and at least 250 lbs., all sweetness. His story is not one of drugs or abuse. Just sheer poverty and too many mouths to feed. His city is far away, so I don't really know how he came to us. After he had been with us for a while, he was ordered to go back to his city since he wasn't under death threat. So what did he do? He hitchhiked back, stating that Hope was now his home!

Gentle, yes, but that's not to say he lacked courage or couldn't be provoked. He did get into trouble a few times, but each infraction was because he was defending a brother. I envisioned Jesus' rage with the money changers in the temple. Each time we explained that although his motive was good, he should never use force.



Alex, with Correne and Bella

One day I saw him tearing down the Mountain toward our front gate. I asked someone where he was going, "Oh, a drug lord is coming to kill one of our day students." Surely, there was more to the story than that! I am not sure what Alex thought he was going to do, but fortunately no one ever showed up and the day student was transported home.

When Alex graduated, he was sent back to his city where he used the skills he learned as a barber. But it wasn't long until he was back—initially on Rhay's couch until he could find his own place.

Alex does have bouts of depression. He gets lonely easily, and feels insecure. Every weekend he came to our house before we were out of our pajamas and stayed until Sunday night. He cuts the boys' hair, helps keep peace, wrestles with the kids. He doesn't require attention. Just presence. To be among his tribe.

When I started writing these 30 Days, my heart was breaking to have "abandoned" Alex. But I just found out he has offered his couch to another graduate who had moved away and now wants to come "home." He laid down the ground rules. "No staying out late. Keep a job. Church. And no girlfriends in the house." God provided companionship for him. Already we've seen an answered prayer.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Philippians 4:5

Day 22: Ricardinho

Help us, Lord, to trust that You are in control. Help Adriana and the team to let Ricardinho go, and to not feel guilty for not succeeding in rescuing him in time.

Although he was 12, his was the size of a 7-year-old. He had no father of record, and his mother, an addict, didn't want him.

Ricardinho wouldn't obey. He talked non-stop. The kids made fun of his size, and he would run away. Our social workers, Adriana and Maria Elisa, would get in our car and bring him back. His slum—behind the big soccer stadium in Campinas—was particularly dangerous. Whenever Adriana and Maria Elisa entered, they knew that informants would radio down that someone suspicious was arriving. “The last time we pulled up and parked in front of his house, he met us with hugs, but refused to come back with us. I feared he had gotten himself in debt,” remembers Adriana.



Ricardinho, right

“Then a man appeared in the doorway. He came in, took out a knife and started to pass it in the dirt floor.” Adriana felt a chill come over her and told Ricardinho it was time to leave. He wouldn't go. Adriana assured him we would always be there for him, but in her heart she knew things were different this time. “It was a very scary situation,” she says. “Our hearts were very heavy—I was so sad.”

Three days later Adriana received word that Ricardinho had been decapitated and his head placed on a stop sign post as a warning to others.

Ricardinho was challenging to work with. He was a mouthy kid, full of attitude. Precisely like the Apostle Peter probably was as a kid. Why did he have to leave this world in such a cruel way? The prince of darkness wants us to think he rules this world.

What happened to Ricardinho's soul? Is he with Jesus? It's too painful to think about. I know that Jesus loved him more than I did. I have to trust that He is in control and try even harder to convince the next child to leave the streets.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. Revelation 21:4

Day 23: Dayane

Thank you, God, for giving Dayane a second chance, and especially for being a loving God who allows second (and third) chances...so important for children who were never before given any kind of chance.

To break any bad habit is hard, even little ones. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, right? But imagine making a 360 degree change in your life! Sometimes it is impossible to deny that only God could have turned this ship around.

Sadly, most of our kids' back stories are similar: Dayane. Mother dead, father ran off, raised by a grandmother who couldn't really control her. Fell into a bad crowd and at the age of 12, and her grandmother gave up and brought her to us.

But even here her rebellious spirit led her to look for more excitement. She ran away regularly to frequent brothels where she could sell drugs and her body. Searching for her family, she took a bus to Rio where she trafficked drugs and prostituted. She made a small fortune trafficking machine guns when she was only 14!

On her birthday, she learned that her father, whom she had not seen since she was a little girl, had been killed by traffickers. Knowing she was upset, an aunt found her and invited her to church. That night the pastor, who had never met her, called her to go forward and told her she needed to go back to The City of Youth. She started to sob and asked if he would help her get accepted back into the program.

Dayane has been back for a few months. In June she shared her testimony with our kids and a team of visiting Americans. She said she had guns, money, sex, but no peace, and she had to come back to The City of Youth to be transformed.

Dayane is an attentive student. She is active in our church, and she takes nothing for granted. We believe that she will not run away. In fact, she has already expressed concern about leaving after graduation—an event that won't take place for at least three years.

Last week she cried in church again, but these were tears of relief—the peace that passes all understanding. Her house parent told us, “She’s starting to dream again. She dreams of her future, and wants to help her grandma.”

Create in me a new heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

Day 24: Bazaar Esperança

Father, please provide for every need of our staff, who have given their lives to this ministry and share all of the heavy burdens. Thank you for being faithful to our prayers and letting us sleep peacefully at nights. We trust that you will always take care of the bills.

It's Bazaar! Well, maybe not so bizarre, but pretty amazing. About two years ago, we were going through a tough time financially. There just wasn't enough money to cover the bills and all the salaries. With the holidays coming, you would think that the employees would revolt.

Instead, the Brazilian staff decided to attack the problem themselves. One started an online group, "Associates of Hope," where members pledged \$10 Reais a month. Another started a "Cantina," using staples from her own kitchen to sell baked goods to raise funds.

Then the ideas went to the next level. What about an all-day bazaar? We could ask volunteers to donate good or services, which we would sell. The first "Bazaar Esperança" brought in about 700 people and raised \$6,000 Reais. Each quarter it has grown. Our fourth festival, this past August, brought in 2,400 people and raised \$13,500. There were clowns, entertainment, raffles for bicycles, employment counseling, and teeth cleaning.

A local pet shop donated dog baths and grooming. We sold tickets to our pool. There were free medical exams. All this was done through our own employees, volunteering their time to organize and gather the donations. In all, 50 other merchants participated. It was no surprise what one of the biggest fundraisers was—a soccer tournament! Each team paid a small fee, and each player brought a bag of dry goods.

This was such an inspiration to me. How many of us could face the day without the security of a pay-check? This population lives check to check, and few employees have a huge amount of savings, if any. Philip is responsible for ensuring that they are paid. But instead of complaining, they have come and said, "Don't worry, we've got your back." I love these people, and they believe in Hope.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:23-24



Theater presentation during festival

Day 25: Tulio, Part 1

Lord, for the thousands children who are still on the streets, we cry out to you. Each one has a name and a soul. Send your angels to protect them. Help us with our occasional unbelief...

It was the final night of Carnival, and the numbers of children swarming central square was overwhelming. They had said our work would not be easy. Dressed in rags, some of the children wandered aimlessly while others huddled together, trying to sleep. Girls that should have been sparkling fifth graders peddled their bodies in exchange for food. Boys that would have been computer whizzes begged for coins.

Behind a newspaper stand, a group of tattered little boys huddled under a dirty blanket. As I approached, one of the faces seemed familiar, and bending closer, I could hardly believe my eyes: Tulio!



Tulio

When Tulio had been at the City of Youth, I quickly grew very fond of him, with his bright eyes and brilliant smile. But the courts shortly remanded Tulio to the custody of a scraggly, foul-mouthed uncle. No surprise: within weeks, he was back on the streets.

That night, the Tulio I had known was gone. His bright eyes were replaced with red eyes that could barely stay open. His brilliant smile had been exchanged for dry, cracked lips. I asked Tulio if he remembered me: his red eyes, lost in time, searched for an answer. He slowly nodded, but would say nothing more.

I tried to talk to him, to remind him of God's promise that he could prosper and have abundant life. But only his body was present; his mind was in another place. Even so, it was clear that he secretly longed for love, for a touch.

My first twenty minutes in the square were sufficient to extinguish any enthusiasm I had for the remaining night's work. Mustering all my faith, I prayed for God to have compassion on his little life, to work a miracle, and to send an angel to deliver him. Yet, too overpowering for my imperfect faith was the certainty that it was too late, and that we had already lost Tulio to the Devil's grasp—the streets, drugs, and ultimately to his death.

(To be continued tomorrow)

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." Mark 10:27

Day 26: Tulio, Part 2

Thank you, Lord, for loving your children even more than I do. Thank you for being a God of second and third chances.

(Continued from yesterday)

A few weeks after this incident, I left for the United States to marry my American fiancé. Lingered thoughts of Tulio reminded me of the children we had not been able to help. Could Tulio still be alive and on the streets?

Eighteen months later, I returned to Brazil with my husband to visit the children at Hope. During chapel, the children's choir stood up to sing, and my eye was caught by one particularly enthusiastic little boy in the middle. A second later I felt a lump growing in my throat. Those bright eyes... that brilliant smile... could it possibly be?

After eighteen months of haunted memories, I suddenly realized that I was at that moment receiving a very special gift from God—one of the best presents I could possibly hope for. But just to be sure, I rubbed my eyes, and looked again. There was no mistake. Standing before me was Tulio. Singing in a choir! The light was back in his eyes, and the sparkle was in his smile.

Tears running down my cheeks as my heart danced to the music, God spoke to me as clearly as He ever has: "He is here, my child, because the love I have for him is so great."

The seeds planted in Tulio's heart had finally taken root. Singing at the top of his voice, Tulio radiated health, energy, happiness, and love. He was back.

For a brief moment on that Carnival night, I had forgotten that for God, Tulio's future held life. Abundant Life. All in His perfect timing.

Written by Lillian Kortepeter, a former director at the City of Youth

Day 27: Rafael

Father, we ask for your protection over these young lives. Please help those in danger to find their way to Hope. Please equip the Hope staff to constantly improve their methods of calming the turbulent hearts of these confused little boys housed in the bodies of emerging young men like Rafael.

I don't have the answers, but it's comforting to know that I can share this prayer burden with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

A face full of mischief, maybe a little suspicion. His story was not unusual: Abuse, beatings, failed adoption, no supervision, and finally drug abuse—all before he was 9 years-old. At 12 he was sent to us because of a death threat issued by rival drug traffickers...but it wasn't long before he ran away.

We prayed that he would come back, but on June 25th we got the dreaded call: Rafael had been shot in the head 12 times. No one was arrested for his murder; nothing appeared in any newspaper. He was buried in an indigent cemetery in a small plywood box, piled five high with a number assigned to his "coffin."



Rafael

The grief, the feeling of failure, innocence lost, the senselessness of it all. Does any parent ever really get over the death of a child entrusted to them?

There will be no coming back home for Rafael, no joyful lifting him up onto our shoulders. Life expectancy for street children is approximately 2-3 years. There is no way to survive without turning to crime, without becoming the pawn of someone older and more corrupt than yourself. The death of one is a notch in the ladder of evil success for someone else.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. Luke 15:4

Day 28: Thais

Lord, help me always treat people with the dignity they deserve. We praise you, for you are a God who can make all things new.

One of our girls slipped this hand-written letter into the hand of a departing member of a mission team from Princeton Alliance Church. This is the translation...

When I was 8, my stepfather went to prison. My mother was a drug addict, so I started collecting trash to recycle, but she always complained that I was not bringing home enough money.

One day when I was about 11, Señor Joao, the owner of the grocery store, told me I was beautiful. I told my mother, and she became very quiet. That night she left the house late, and when she returned, she woke me up and told me to go into the shed in the back.

There Sr. Joao was waiting for me, smiling and drunk. My mother told me to lay down, and then she left... He tied me up, took some drugs, and then started to hit me, saying that I was useless and that he, Sr. Joao, was the owner of a grocery store. He then abused me.

The next day I was not allowed to leave the storage shed... The first time they let me out, I was terrified of everything. I lived like this for many years... But when I was 14, I stole some money my mother had hidden away and ran away.

(Editor's Note: she then describes her harrowing escape, and how the police took her to an emergency shelter. From there, she was sent to Hope Unlimited. Thais ended her hand-written letter like this:)

...My dream is to become a nurse, and come back to help the children here, at this place, where I learned to walk with my head held high.

A place where she can walk with her head held high. Restoring dignity. Wow. If anyone be in Christ, they are a new creature, the old *does* pass away, and He *does* make all things new..

and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:24



Thais being baptized

Day 29: The Call

Father, please raise up people who want to give of their lives to care for orphaned and abandoned kids in the United States and all over the world. Show me how you may be calling me to serve!

Philip and our son, Marc, 15, were crossing a busy street in São Paulo when a car almost took Philip out. As he jumped back to the curb, he looked at Marc and said, “Wow! What would you do without your old man around?” Marc, not missing a beat, replied, “I’d think, what are the first three things I should change at Hope Unlimited?”

The truth is, we aren’t getting any younger, and ministry must continue after we are gone. Yes, Philip is the only “gringo” on the payroll, and 80 percent of the Brazilian budget is raised in Brazil. But for the ministry to thrive, there is a need for Brazilians and Americans to be in partnership. Who will be the next generation to take up the mantle in Brazil? Could God be calling you? Someone you know? I heard my call when I was at summer camp when I was about 13, but didn’t get to the mission field until 35.

The question is a serious one. How may God be calling you to be involved in rescuing and caring for vulnerable children and orphans?

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” Isaiah 6:8

Day 30: A Call to Prayer

Lord, we pray for the hundreds of thousands of suffering children whose childhood and humanity are being stolen right this second. The little ones who are considered objects instead of human beings. We pray that we will never become calloused and forget about them. Please allow our hearts to be broken and enable us to respond to your call to confront this evil and save these children.

- 400 thousand children are recruited as child soldiers every year—almost one every minute.

Right now, there is a terrified 8 year old boy somewhere who has just been stolen from his parents—perhaps he saw them being shot, perhaps he was forced to shoot them himself. In the coming months this little boy will be deprived and tortured in order to rob him of his very humanity, as he is brainwashed into becoming an evil killing machine. And this is just one statistic...

- 2 million children have died as a direct result of armed conflict in the past 10 years. Millions more have seen family members killed, their homes destroyed, and are surviving on scraps of food.
- More than 300 million children are chronically hungry. 90 percent of these suffer physical impairment. None will have access to health care.
- 2,000 children a *day* die from diseases linked to unsafe water.
- 1.2 million children are trafficked each year. And that is just what is reported. We know there are more...
- 168 Million children between the ages of 5 to 14 are exploited as child laborers, often in horrendous conditions.

There are so many. It is easier to harden your heart and look the other way. But I think you probably aren't participating in this 30 Days of Prayer unless you share this overwhelming sense of need to help the voiceless children *all over the world*. Angelina Jolie, yes you heard me right, has summed up my feelings of privilege and responsibility so well, and in just [a few words](#).

Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Matthew 18:5-6

**30 DAYS *of*
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