

Summer in the City

July 2013

*“...pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.”
(2 Peter 1:19)*

Dear Friends,

“If you could say anything to our readers, what would that be?” This was the question I asked the woman sitting across from me.

“Know my God exists. He is with us. He is attentive to our sadness and our every need. For me, my heart was flooded with tears . . . but today I rejoice and am glad. I want to challenge people in their unbelief. God is true to his promises. Believe in God. He is so beautiful, so awesome.”

In the past two decades I have counseled many lives—all of them with troubles and hardships. But, I can honestly say, Betty’s (not her real name) suffering is unique, and by that I mean it seems to have no end, with struggles and suffering of all kinds, coming from all directions. Oh, yes, I know there are people out there who have suffered more, and in ways that are almost inconceivable. I’ve seen them; I’ve heard them; I’ve touched them. But in counseling, she has been the one that comes to mind that truly has known such a terrible depth of anguish. Two sessions ago my heart was feeling, *“Enough of this!!”* But our great and awesome God was still in control and on the throne.

He showed both Betty and myself by making Himself known to us in a very real way, both in, and then out of session. Listen to the following story. But do not just listen with your ears, listen with your heart. Walk in her shoes for a moment. See her and “touch” her pain. And then be amazed at how our God showed up in her life and said, “I AM.”

Where do I begin? I will give you just a glimpse into this precious woman's life. Betty daily lives with three neurological and immune disorders. The challenges of living with ongoing physical limitations, pain, and uncertainty of what tomorrow holds because of these illnesses is very debilitating. She recently had surgery from a bacterial infection in her esophagus. As a result of this, she was hospitalized and caught yet another infection. This all occurred just a few days after she had buried her mother. She is now unable to work for the first time in her life, and it had nearly crushed her spirit.

Two sessions ago I sat with Betty, who has three sons, and saw a woman who was grieving deeply for one of them. He is a twin and in his early thirties. Despite him being born healthy and strong, he has experienced tremendous physical and emotional pain most of his life. When he was just 9 years old a man lifted a gun and at random shot her son in the stomach. The doctors warned her that they did not believe he would survive the injury. But he did! Twenty three grueling operations later and she is sitting in my office, her son now 33 years old, in



intensive care, and yet again ready to go into surgery in another state. Of all the operations he had endured in his life, this was to be the most risky, with the physicians telling Betty, once again, that she should not expect him to survive - his stomach would be left open for 23 days!

As we sat there, though, we felt the divine presence of God. I did not understand it. Betty did not understand it, yet we both felt it. At one point we looked at one another and said, "He is here with us". And, friends, He stayed throughout the entire session. Betty was suffering deeply, and we as believers know our Redeemer is closest to those who suffer. He did not run from the leper or the woman at the well or the countless others who cried out to Him in times of great despair, but instead drew them close, and He did the same for Betty.

Out of pure desperation Betty and I sat and called on God together, crying out for healing. Betty left Refuge and went home, and though she could barely walk, threw herself down on her knees, alongside yet another other son, and cried out again for healing. They claimed together, with an unclenching hope, that God would heal and restore her son's life even though the doctors insisted he would not make it.

At this very same moment, I would learn later, the other twin was alongside her son at the hospital crying to God and praying for his brothers healing.

Her son, who was dying all his life and a marginal Christian, as he heard his brother, who would not leave his side, also began crying out to God. He began to repent of sin in his life, and how he had hurt his wife and family and caused them pain.

And then God stepped in and healed him - the next day his whole stomach was healed. This news prompted the top surgeon at the hospital to come down and examine him himself. Amazed, he promptly removed him from intensive care and ordered the surgery to have his stomach closed.

Without God, without His hope, what hope would this family have had? What hope would I have had in caring for her when she came in?

Here I am looking at the face of suffering, turned into the face of hope and gladness. This hope, this face, was something new, something I had never seen before in her. Yet, suddenly it was there. He is so near to those who suffer. I see it time and time again at Refuge. A hurting human being walks through the door, sits down in a counseling room, not even knowing what it is they need, and then God draws them near. It happens every day; it happened to Betty. And that is when she said she wanted to challenge unbelief. It is such a testimony!

In the work of Refuge, there are many ways to help. Prayer is no small thing. We at Refuge need your prayers; the people whom we serve need your prayers. But, to speak the truth, we need your support. Others just like Betty walk through our doors every single day! Some come in afraid. Some are desperate. Some are confused. Some are in physical pain. But ALL come in looking for Jesus, whether they know it or not. They do not enter Refuge's door by mistake. At the end of the day, whether or not we have met the need they were aware of, the spiritual need remains. He wants their hearts!

Yes, our work at Refuge is to serve a hurting, underprivileged people, but He has us where we are to show them Jesus while doing so. Without that, what would Betty have done? Where would she be now?

I close by asking you to please consider helping us keep our doors open to the “Bettys” of the world. They are many. Ask Him how you can be a part of our work. We are here for them, but NEED your support and prayers to help us continue this important work.

Friends, supporters, may I challenge you? “Betty” is not just a story, or a name; she is a real person with deep hurts, and a deep need for healing. Without your partnership, we could never extend our caring hands to her and so many others just like her.

Won't you please prayerfully consider helping keep our doors open for the remainder of this year? Here is how you might meditate.

- A \$300 gift will keep Refuge open for one day.
- A \$600 gift will keep Refuge open for two days.
- A \$1,200 gift will keep Refuge open for four days.
- Other _____ as your heart leads.

My friends, on behalf of the board of directors and staff, thank you!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Hernandez, M.A.
Executive Director

