

Word on the Street

Volume II, Issue X, Nov. 2007 Here's Life Inner City in New York City Matt and Anna Shenk

On Suffering: Anna



Mike, second from left on the back row, at a Giants event

Two years ago, when Matt and I first moved to Crown Heights, we met a young teenager named Mike.* He and a friend helped us move into our apartment and we have considered Mike, now 16, a friend ever since. Sadly, a month ago, Mike, was shot several times while defending his sister. Thankfully, Mike survived, but lost his right leg and has had to undergo extensive medical treatment.

A few days after this tragedy, Matt and I arrived at the annual Christian Community Development Conference. It is a gathering of people who have been called to restore and rebuild our nation's cities in the name of Christ. Many of these folks have been in this mission field for decades and they have seen and experienced a great deal of suffering. One afternoon, I attended a seminar on what you can do to "stay for the long haul" in urban ministry. High on the list was the critical need to develop a theology of suffering; to know who God is and how that practically relates to the brokenness caused by sin in the world.

I clearly remember one of the first times I came face to face with suffering. It was in college, as I volunteered at a home for city kids. On the drive home from an outing, one little boy taunted a girl, about seven years old. At first, she fought back, but then she reached her limit and something snapped. It was as if the altercation had triggered some sort of defense mechanism and she literally froze. She did not speak. She did not blink. Her body was rigid, like a marble statue. It was not until one of the regular staff had held her and comforted her for some time that she came back to life. That night, I did not sleep. I was engaged in a mental, spiritual and emotional wrestling match with God. My tears would not stop. I could not conceive what had happened in this young girl's life that could have produced such a terrible defense. I could not understand how God would allow someone to sin so gravely against a child. How could He be a loving God?

Over the years, I have found comfort in this world in the fact that our savior, Jesus Christ, endured the greatest suffering of any man or woman. Separated from his Father to come to this earth, he cried out to his Father to save him from death. But the Father did not intercede. Out of love, He allowed his Son to be nailed to a cross. In Hebrews 5:8, it says that "although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

I am on a constant journey to develop my own personal understanding of what is true about God in the midst of suffering. Each of us is. Now, as I pray for Mike, I hope to God that his suffering in this world will not lead him to despair but that it would lead him to hope, obedience, and to becoming more like Jesus Christ. As he is refined by these sufferings, I pray that others would see the light of Christ and that God might redeem Mike's suffering by drawing many to salvation through his testimony. Redemption of the brokenness of the world is what I pray for. And I pray and act towards an end to the violence that causes suffering in our community.

**Name has been changed for safety reasons. See back page for an update on Mike and how you can help.*

An Update on Mike from Beth Webb, Our Assistant Pastor's Wife

Let me brag for a moment and tell you a little bit more about who Mike is. My husband, Jared, and I had the opportunity to meet Mike five years ago. Ever since that time, Mike has proclaimed Jared as his “godfather” and we’ve proudly accepted him as our “godson.” **Mike is an amazing teenager.** When we took Mike to camp a couple of years ago, though he was literally the biggest kid at the camp (he’s 6’8”), he was awarded the “Gentle” award. Ever since we can remember Mike has wanted to play football – his dream was to play professionally one day. Fort Hamilton High School (the best high school football team in NYC) actually recruited him to their school to play football. He had to sit on the bench last year because of the school transfer but started playing football this fall. Due to his size he was already being scouted to play football for Syracuse University and Rutgers. Our hopes were that he would be able to get a full ride scholarship to college. Throughout the years, Mike has made incredible decisions and he has surrounded himself with positive role models in all arenas of his life. Throughout the years he’s been asked to be a part of gangs and other negative behavior but has always chosen the better way. So, as you can imagine, the reality of Mike’s injuries deeply affects his future. Thankfully, he is already talking about wanting to attend college and saying that he will walk one day. His faith is so challenging to watch.

Over the past month Mike has made **incredible** progress. Though he is still in the hospital he is no longer on a breathing tube and is healing well from his many surgeries. He is sitting up, eating, talking and even laughing at times. Mike, however, currently does not have movement beneath his waist and the doctors are unsure if he will walk again. Mike’s injuries are very serious but he is trying to keep a positive attitude. Mike’s shooter was arrested recently but the accomplice is still on the loose, which at this point makes Mike’s family feel very unsafe. In the midst of this tragedy however there is much to thank God for.... the main thing is that Mike is alive and has made it through the hardest part of the physical recovery.

Praise and Prayer

- Please join us in thanking God for Mike’s life and pray for his physical, spiritual and emotional recovery. The family has many financial needs at this time, including moving into a new apartment, and we would ask you to pray about contributing monetarily. Please email or call us for details on how to give.
- Please join us in praising God for the fact that violence **does not** define our community. It may feel like it does at times but the Lord is doing great things here and the good far outweighs the bad.
- Praise God for a donation of new laptops to our church, which will enable Matt to start Saturday computer classes for adults and open computer access for the community. Pray for all the details to come together as he starts this new initiative at the first of the year.
- Please pray for our church’s big Christmas outreach on Saturday, Dec. 16. We hope that we will reach at least a hundred families with the love of Christ through this event.

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Please make checks payable to Campus Crusade for Christ, account #0572439

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