

# Reflection: What to do when there is no food

July 22, 2011

James had asked Pastor Pais a question and the response he gave looked like the gesture an umpire gives when a runner is safe. James presses the question again and got the same gesture. But this time, it was more insistent. "How long have you been out of food?" James asked through an interpreter.

"Fifteen days." Pais replied.

There, in the middle of rusty tin, ragged plywood and tattered tarps that make up the shelters of these people, Pais explained how 73 orphans and several adults survived for that time. They bought a grapefruit, peeled it and sold slices on the street. The money they made off one grapefruit allowed them to buy two grapefruits. That allowed them to feed the peelings to the children in order to put something in their empty stomachs.

We had to go to two neighborhood stores to find enough food for Pais and his orphans to eat for a week until James' next shipment of food arrived.

James and I were traveling together because our missions overlapped. I was in Haiti to find materials and equipment so Texas Baptist Men teams can build and rebuild Christian schools and orphanages and install water filtration equipment to overcome the extreme shortage of safe drinking water. James' mission, among many things, is to provide food for orphanages like Pais'.

"Not all orphanages are this desperate." James assured me. I silently thanked my Father for that. "The next stop is an orphanage where my buddy lives," he continued.

I remembered Buddy from a previous trip. Buddy had been retrieved from a river near the orphanage. It's unclear whether some event during the earthquake had caused Buddy to be in the river or if his mother had discarded him because he has cerebral palsy.

James and Buddy had somehow connected, and my memory of them together is forever etched in my mind. I remember how James had lowered his face to be mere inches of Buddy's face and how they had engaged in a game that only they knew. It is easy for me to believe that Buddy had never experienced such intimacy before. To witness the joy of this young boy and this grandfather as they played was exquisite.

I was anticipating seeing that scene again. We needed something to offset the hardness of the conditions we found ourselves surrounded by. James walked in front of me as we entered the room where we knew Buddy lived.

"Where is he?" James asked the woman who is caring for the children in the room. I was stunned into stillness as I saw her make the same umpire gesture that Pais had made. I heard the breath crushed out of James' lungs as the weight of her answer registered. Unable to witness the pain of James' grief and endure mine as well, I had to leave my brother in the room.

I know that our ministries have saved the lives of many people—including orphaned children.

But it is with a new poignancy that we see the Father's perspective from Matthew 18 where Jesus tells of the shepherd leaving the 99 to find the one. It is now easier to understand why God is willing to endure so much and to sacrifice so much in order to save those whom he loves so dearly. We, too, are unwilling that even one should perish.

God has called us to Haiti to tend his little sheep and to help raise them up in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. I brace myself as I prepare to return

to Haiti again and again, subjecting myself to this pain and grief that I know I will have to endure while there. To not go is just too horrific a thought to even entertain.

**Editor's Note:** *Texas Baptist Men is recruiting teams for construction and water purification projects in Haiti. Volunteers will build classrooms and put a new roof on the facilities of Croix Hillaire Baptist Church and School near Petit Goave. Teams will serve July 26-Aug. 4, Aug. 9-18, Aug. 30- Sept. 8, Sept. 13-22 and Sept. 27-Oct. 6. Estimated cost for airfare, lodging and meals is \$1,600 per person. TBM and the Baptist General Convention of Texas each are offering \$300 one-time grants per volunteer, leaving a \$1,000 balance per worker. For more information or to register as a volunteer, contact Ernie Rice at [ernierice@yahoo.com](mailto:ernierice@yahoo.com) or call (830) 534-1211. To be placed on an e-mail distribution list for prayer concerns related to the projects, e-mail [rae.jones@texasbaptistmen.org](mailto:rae.jones@texasbaptistmen.org) . Financial contributions for the project should be sent to Texas Baptist Men, 5351 Catron Dr., Dallas, TX 75227 and labeled "Project Haiti."*