

By Melanie Souder, WCA parent and chaperone

Our team stepped off of the plane in Montego Bay, Jamaica in the early afternoon, tired and hungry, but filled with grateful anticipation, especially for those of us who were returning for a second time. All through our day of travel we could see that God had clearly been preparing the way ahead for us even before we began planning this trip. We saw God's grace unfolding minute by minute. He had gone ahead to clear the path, remove the obstacles and then stepped aside and said "Go now, and do what I sent you to do."

Our week in Jamaica was filled with an abundance of opportunities for evangelism. Our team performed powerful dramas, which depicted God's love and forgiveness. We visited several schools in the neighboring communities where our team led praise and worship, performed the "Bible Man" skit and had the children take part in making salvation bracelets. We assisted the Marley Hill Methodist church in painting a building and presented the Pastor there with a monetary donation to help with damage done to their church building after Hurricane Dean. We delivered food bags to families in need and prayed with them. We visited a children's home and spent time feeding, loving and playing with the babies and toddlers there. We spent some time at an Infirmary, which housed folks who were elderly, mentally and physically handicapped, and some who were suffering with AIDS. The conditions there were sometimes unbearable, but our team withstood the sights and smells to listen to their stories, give them a hug and most of all just sit with them and visit. The majority of these residents never get visitors other than outsiders, like us.

I think one of our most memorable outreaches was when our team went to visit an old lady named "Miss Emma." Our job was to repair some holes in her roof so that the rain could no longer get in to her home. We were advised prior to our trip that getting there wasn't easy. We would have to travel down a bumpy dirt road and then come to a point where we would have to climb a path by foot. The men unloaded pieces of old used tin, which would be used to do the roof repairs, and we began to work our way up the trail. Finally, at the top of the hill, there stood a small run down shanty, it was no bigger than the size of a very small laundry room. I think our first response was, how could anyone even live in there? There was no running water and only an outhouse for a bathroom. Cooking was done on an outside makeshift fire pit. Miss Emma stood outside, she could not really see us clearly because she is nearly blind. Her leathered worn skin reflected her age, all 97 years. Her

clothes were mismatched and tattered and she was bare foot. We greeted her as she walked toward our voices with her long cane like stick in hand. Our YWAM guide told her we were there to fix her roof, she was so happy. Some of the men began the repairs while the rest of us found a place to sit near Miss Emma. We communicated with her as best we could. She was hard of hearing but we sang some praise songs to her anyway. I asked her if she had Jesus in her heart and she proudly confessed to us all, “yes, yes, I have Jesus in me heart.” At that moment, her near blindness was a blessing. Tears began to flow down many of our faces, we could not contain the emotions of joy and sadness that we were feeling. You would never have known that just a few months previous to our visit, our dear sweet Miss Emma was drug out of her home, beaten and raped. Through those worn out eyes, we could see Jesus.

At the end of our week our team gathered together as we did each night, to debrief, and to talk about our experiences. We had all felt in some small way the people of Jamaica’s pain and suffering in both the young and the old. Our hearts truly hurt and we were filled with a variety of emotions. We prayed, praised and gave God thanks and glory for all we had seen, heard and experienced. God reminded me of something and I shared it with the team. In Christ, we have the hope and can be assured that for those who we will see again in glory, they will be there waiting to say, “remember when you visited me, you listened to me and you gave me a hug, thank-you for taking the time.” We were filled to overflowing with God’s perfect peace and joy.