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COMMUNITY, NOT COMFORT



As we bumped along a deeply rutted, dusty road to our first day of home visits, our team held onto door handles and put our faces as close to the A/C vents as possible. Looking around, I became keenly aware of how much discomfort we were all experiencing as a team. Thirst, exhaustion, and even nausea were all front and center for us in those moments. Comfort, (or rather the lack thereof), had our full attention! But soon we pulled up to a very humble Ugandan home, and everything shifted. Comfort was pushed aside, because a lesson on community was about to have center stage.

As we met the Ugandan family, you never would have known by their faces that they were suffering from a lack of basic life needs. They greeted us with the biggest of smiles, broke out every chair they could find in the neighborhood, and offered us whatever small amount of food they had in their tiny house. They weren't embarrassed by how little they had—they were just overjoyed to host us. It was terribly humbling. Community is what mattered most.

This lesson was repeated a few days later when we got to go to summer camp with 200 Hands of Love kids! Although the kids loved getting to eat three full meals a day and treasured the gifts of balls and games we

brought, they actually wanted time with us more than anything else we offered them. They asked to play cards with us, braid our hair, sit near us during dinner and walk with us at twilight. They asked how they could help with menial tasks we were working on and they sat down with us whenever they could to ask questions about us and our lives in America.

They didn't want us to leave. They asked for photos and hugs and more time together. Their focus was on community, not comfort.

During our time at camp, my sponsored daughter Edith was recovering from typhoid. Even though she was weak and had very little appetite, she refused to leave Kaitlynn and me and walked with us wherever we were going. I was worried about her health, and without even thinking about it, I began a litany of instructions to her about hydrating and resting. Then it dawned on me that she was 21 years old and might not appreciate being told what to do! So I began to apologize for mothering her too much. She stopped walking abruptly and grabbed my arm. Turning to me, she said earnestly, "No, no no! Please don't stop mothering me." It took my breath away. This is not a sentence I was expecting and the determination in her eyes held a sadness that hit me right in the heart. Being "mothered" isn't an annoyance here, it is a treasure. I wasn't stepping on her independence, I was stepping into her world. Being near someone who wanted to care for her was more important than rest, even more important than feeling well. Her focus was on community, not comfort.

I saw this same focus again the next night at camp. Our sponsored son, Edrine, gathered Kaitlynn and I for dinner and then sat down to join us. But when he realized our younger sponsored daughter, Tahiya, wasn't with us, he quickly left his seat (and his plate full of food containing the treasured meat and vegetables that he likely wouldn't get to eat again for a very long time), and went to find her. This was a girl he had just met! How could someone brand new be so



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important to him? He only got introduced to her because she happens to be one of our other sponsored kids. But now that he knew she belonged to our little “sponsored family”, he immediately saw her as his sister, and he was determined to have our little family eat together, no matter how long it took to find her or how cold his food got. Community, not comfort.

Community, for Uganda, is not just an option. They don’t live without it. They work toward it in their interactions. The village families and children that we met welcomed us as though we were old friends, even though we had never met. Their neighbors welcomed us as well. No one averted eye contact out of embarrassment or suspicion. Everyone engaged. When we met the kids at camp, they did the same. Eye contact was everywhere. The extension of hands and hugs multiplied every minute. Uganda kids and adults alike know how to love one another in community.

The lesson for me was not one of shame, but one of refocus. God calls us all to live in community. He calls us to focus on one another, not on ourselves and what feels most comfortable. He calls us to this because he knows it makes us better. I love being an American. I am so grateful for the freedoms and the privileges that it has afforded me and my family. But in the midst of all of that freedom and privilege, I had to stop and ask myself if I’m guilty of hailing comfort over community. The answer is that sometimes, I do. Instead, I want to work at being more “Ugandan” in this area of my life. They gave me some beautiful real-life examples for which I am forever grateful. Uganda has this one right!



- Written by: Rebecca Herman 2025 Camp Missionary