

Renewal of ANCIENT RUINS

By Chelsea Cleveland



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I live and attend school in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the best city in the world. Minneapolis is home to the beautiful Mississippi Riverfront, the biggest shopping mall in the country, tons of art galleries, unique urban pockets filled with coffee shops galore, and feet upon feet of snow each December through April. I absolutely love this place.

Last year God began whispering to my heart about the many people also calling Minneapolis their home who live with HIV/AIDS. I've always known that AIDS is an enormous issue internationally, but it is increasingly becoming an issue of dire importance closer to home. In Minneapolis alone there are over 2,000 reported cases of people living with HIV/AIDS.

God began giving me creative ideas on how to make an impact in the lives of these people. I tracked down a non-profit organization in Minneapolis that funds 16 homes throughout the city. These homes house people who are living with AIDS and are unable to care for themselves in a solitary environment. I

gathered a small group of students together that meet every Friday at one of the houses called the Agape Home. Over the course of the last semester we made some very cool relationships with the four men who live there. Our main responsibility is to cook dinner and take care of cleanup, but we often make time for card games and conversations about the guys' lives and the state of the world in general.

During this short two and one-half hour time period, we get to hear all about the things that are important to them. One man gets home from work each Friday afternoon and comes into the kitchen to make himself a cup of tea. He then proceeds to watch the nightly news and express his deep concern about world situations such as the devastation going on in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Another man keeps us updated on his family. He has children with whom he has little contact. One of my biggest prayers when I chat with Jesus about these guys

is that God will call out their father nature. Though this gentleman is lacking in this area, I still see how very proud he is of his kids. The first thing he said when I met him was, "Do you want to see a picture of my baby girl?"

I absolutely love all of the interaction we have with these guys, but, through prayer there's an even greater dimension to the impact we have in their lives. When I first started this group, God gave me Isaiah 61:1-4 and told me these verses encapsulate our purpose in these men's lives. Spiritually, we are to bind up the

brokenhearted, proclaim freedom, and bestow a crown of beauty instead of ashes and the oil of gladness instead of mourning and despair. God talked with me about spiritually attacking the strongholds that often lead to HIV/AIDS, such as homosexuality, promiscuity, and drugs. I believe God wants to use us not only to put a bandage on the wounds of a hurting people through food and a smile, but to also penetrate ancient barriers and bring deep healing to ruins that have been passed down from generation to generation.

I've spoken Isaiah 61:3-4 over these men many times: "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations." I pray these men will come into all the depths of intimacy with their God for which they were created and that out of this intimacy they will be the ones to stand in their families and declare renewal of lives long devastated.

Our group may never actually speak the name of Jesus to any of these men, but I pray they would see Jesus' great compassion in our eyes and feel the sweetness of His love dripping with every word we speak. I want to be so saturated with the character and presence of God that they cannot help but know what Jesus is like after interacting with us. In doing so, I believe God will use us to literally change the course of their lives for eternity and their families for generations.

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