


Chapter 3



“Let’s be the hands that comfort every cold and lonely man. Let’s be the feet for those who do not have the strength to stand.”

Songs

If you are like many people, then songs have a way of getting under your skin and settling into your spirit. The Lord can really use that, too, if we let him. This is just what was happening to Rachel during those fall months of 1993. It was through songs that the Lord gave us the specific vision for this ministry, through her.

During these months, I would regularly share with Rachel the burden of what I was seeing in my work at Juvenile Probation, the brokenness of kids and families, the ongoing tragedies being played out in the lives of so many who did not know the Lord, and the lack of any structure to communicate the spiritual truth so clearly lacking in their lives.

As she was hearing about the experiences with so many broken kids and broken families at Juvenile Probation, she was also hearing songs on the Christian radio that would talk about being the hands and feet of Jesus. Each time she would hear those songs she would be moved to tears.

With every passing week, Rachel’s heart was being moved more deeply. She felt the Lord was trying to show her something but

had no idea what it was. She was sure it had to do with kids, but that was it. She and her husband Bob were involved in a small group at their church, and that group began to pray with them about this burden. There was a ladies' Bible study group she attended who prayed with her as well. Those seeds were some of the most significant ones, as it was clear the Lord was setting things into motion.

There was one song, *Arms Around The World*¹, by the Gaither Vocal Band that moved her especially.

*Broken hearts, crying eyes, wait alone in the dark of the night.
It's time we went beyond the walls of our own lives.
It's time we bridged the distance. It's time we heard the cries.
Oh, one by one, hand in hand, a heart to heart, oh, we've got to understand,
There's so much more to life than living day to day.
We've got to make the difference, we've got to make a way.*

The words of the chorus were particularly powerful.

*Let's be the hands that comfort every cold and lonely man.
Let's be the feet for those who do not have the strength to stand.
Let's be the love that reaches out to every boy and girl.
Let's be the arms that reach around the world.*

Over the next month and a half, everything became more and more intense for Rachel, and there were more and more tears as well.

One day, while she was alone in the kitchen stirring ground meat, that song came on the radio again. Rachel began sobbing uncontrollably to the point she could hardly function, and she knew she could not keep going like that. She turned off the stove, went into her living room, fell down on her face before God and cried out, "Lord, whatever it is I have to know—I'm ready." In that moment she gave it to God and felt a huge sense of release.

While she was driving some days later, the Lord gave her a vision. She saw a building, and in this building were several rooms. As

¹ ARMS AROUND THE WORLD Cheryl Rogers/William Gaither/Lonnie Jones/Suzanne Jennings/Terry Franklin/Barbi Franklin
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she stood in a big hallway, kids were going past her to one room while others were passing her going another direction. To the right there was another room with parents involved in parenting classes. The vision was overwhelming; it meant a facility and all that comes along with one, such as finances to acquire and maintain it, the people to staff it, as well as a budget and the various programs. Again, it was so big and almost too much for her to grasp, and she felt ill. A couple of days later, while reading to her son Benjamin, the Lord gently spoke to her and said, *“You don’t start there, you start in one backyard.”*

In that moment Rachel had a tremendous sense of peace. As she shared this revelation with Bob and my wife Robin and me, we realized that one backyard was something we could do.

Scriptures that we have always known began to take on new meaning during this time, scriptures like Ezekiel 22:30, *“I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.”*

And also Isaiah 6:8, *“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”*

I was still working full-time at the Probation Department, while Rachel was a stay-at-home mom and as such, her schedule allowed for many opportunities to talk with different people in the community about the needs and what all was out there for kids. We thought that maybe we were supposed to get involved in something already going on. We would talk together about all these things daily, and the four of us (Rachel, Bob, Robin and I) would often get together in the evenings to pray.

Rachel spoke to a lot of people and concluded that many activities were available for kids in the community, but, outside of church, there was nothing that incorporated the gospel. And even most of the church programs were not being attended by the kids I was seeing at Juvenile and others the Lord was placing on our hearts. We knew there were many individual churches doing things within their own walls, but as far as we could tell, no one

was reaching out to unchurched and at-risk kids with the gospel in their own neighborhoods.

Rachel ended up in the barrio talking with a pastor, trying to find out if he thought there was a need to work with the kids in that area. He said that he thought so and sent her to an early childhood center near Rio Vista Elementary School. She was excited about talking with someone who worked with neighborhood kids, but when she got there she was told they were only working with the elderly at the time. As she was leaving, she asked if there was anyone in the neighborhood who worked with kids. The woman pointed to a house across the street and suggested she talk to them because they sometimes took kids to church.

Thinking it couldn't hurt, she went over and knocked on the door. It was the home of Lupe and Gloria Mata, a godly young couple with a baby son living in what had once been a nunnery (a convent for nuns where many seeds of prayer had surely been sown years before). Rachel had barely begun explaining that we were interested in working with the kids in the area when Gloria, who had answered the door, said, "You can use my yard."

The next few moments were an awkward silence while they both just sort of stared at each other. Rachel was stunned, as she had not even thought about asking that question. Sometime later we found out that six or so months earlier someone else had come to the Matas' house asking to use their yard for a Backyard Bible Club (still more seeds). After talking and praying about it, Gloria and Lupe had decided they would let them. However, that person never came back. Naturally, when Gloria met Rachel at her door, she assumed that was who we were, and since they had already talked about it and decided to allow it, she said we could use her yard.

During our evening meetings we prayed together, asking for God to open the doors if this was of him, and if not, that he would close them tightly. The next few weeks were a flurry of activity as we met almost nightly to pray and plan. It was as if all the doors we approached just started flying open, and everything came together.

As we began to get clear instruction from the Lord, I started to write it all down. The Lord gave me a verse during this time in Habakkuk 2:2:

Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.

We did just that; then things really began to happen. The plans and notes that were written during those few weeks have been a guiding force behind the ministry until this day. I still have them in a file in my desk and pull them out periodically as a reminder of our original mandate from the Lord. I think the Holy Spirit was saying that people with an idea are a dime a dozen, but when you write the ideas down they become real, something you can get hold of. I believe this is what is at the heart of that verse in Habakkuk. We started running with those “tablets” as heralds then; we are still running now. Lord willing, we will continue to run and help others to do the same.

We began the process of setting up a non-profit corporation and felt very strongly that the Lord was leading us to organize the ministry independently from any one church. This would help people understand it as a kingdom endeavor rather than something a certain church was doing. Earlier the Lord had simply laid on Rachel’s heart to call it “House of Faith.” A short time later he laid on mine that our mission would be to, “Take JESUS to neighborhood children, youth, and families.” In no time we had a logo, purpose statement, goals, ideas and lesson plans.

We sincerely believed that if this was of God, then he would bring others alongside us, so we got a P.O. Box and a checking account under the name “House of Faith.” It’s sort of funny, but at first there was no one to send us anything, so I would actually mail things to myself just to have the excitement of receiving mail in the House of Faith box. Everywhere we went and everyone we talked to were potential targets for our “heralding.”

I wrote hundreds of letters to anyone and everyone we could think of who might be interested in what we were doing. Most never responded but slowly the Lord drew together a support

base that remains faithful to this day and still continues to steadily grow. It is made up of people who share the passion of reaching at-risk kids with the gospel of Jesus Christ—being his hands and feet to neighborhood children, youth and families.

The day was fast approaching when it would be time to go to the Matas' yard and actually serve as his hands and feet. What would it be like? Would there be any kids who would come? If they came, would they stay? How many would there be? Would they want us to come back? All we had were questions. We didn't know the answers to any of them, but the Lord did. As for all the answers, they would come soon enough.