

VALUES

It's time for a check up.

John E. Blake

I heard someone say that kids know the cost of everything, but understand the value of nothing. Even at the ages of eight and seven Miguel and Louis knew exactly the cost of every prize they received. Special gifts from adopting families at Christmas were easily sized up and compared against “stuff” other kids had. I wondered if these two brothers realized the generosity and kindness of these strangers. So I asked.

“Hey fellas, what’s up with *dising* the *bling-bling* those folk gave you?” Basically I asked, why aren’t you thankful? Miguel’s answer *rattled my cage* and made me think. He said, “Man those anglos don’t know me or what I like! Anyway, I can’t be seen with stuff like that. They [other boys] will laugh at me.” All I could think about was all the teaching he had heard, the time he spent with our staff, the places we had gone, and how appreciative his family had been. Was this the payoff? Honestly, I thought, why are we out here?

Ask yourself, what compels you -- what motivates you to minister to city kids? Is it because there is a need and no one else seems to care? Or does it satisfy your own need for self worth? The only thing that would really compel someone to labor unnoticed and without reward must be rooted in values, which are based upon the Word of God. After pausing at Miguel’s answer, Jesus words flooded my mind, “*Even so... even so...*”

It caused me to check my motives and asked myself, why are you working with these city kids year after year? Perhaps you are overdue for a check up as well? Why not perform your own by using the following checklist?



Do I Value Kids in the Inner City?

Are you committed to a philosophy that values the practice of biblical principles (*James 1:26-2:1*) and makes them operational in the lives of individuals? Is your life and ministry enriched by the city and its people, especially city kids (*Matthew 18:14*)? Miguel and Louis live in the worse Hispanic neighborhood of our city, yet the time spent with them enabled ministry growth to other children as well. Workers grew to love the children, their families, and their culture.



Do I Value becoming Vulnerable?

Your ministry must be directed towards and also include the vulnerable, “*the least of these my brethren.*” Do you seek to validate the human dignity that is due to people in all communities? Risk means being willing for a new approach or task -- but not the relationships -- to fail as a result of a commitment to creative solutions and leadership development. Miguel and Louis were visited at their home each week and workers got to know their mom. She offered tamales and other food. The workers became her friend. They learned and incorporated Mexican culture into their overall outreach. Not all kids enjoyed the additions. Some stopped attending.



Do I Value Discipleship?

Do you identify, affirm, and support grass roots, indigenous leadership development? This would be a biblical philosophy of discipleship, which expects new converts to become leaders within their own neighborhood. Will you personally disciple one or several city kids for one to fifteen years? Miguel and a group of his friends will have contact with our ministry for three more years, then given the opportunity to be a teen leader with us.



Do I Value Empowerment?

There must be a willingness to trust and include the cultural perspectives and capabilities of various communities you target for ministry. Do you seek individuals and churches from these communities to enter into a partnership for the spiritual welfare of city kids? As workers made themselves available, Miguel and Louis' mom was able to share her concerns for her family. Tutoring for the boys, a better understanding and trust of American culture, and becoming connected to a Hispanic church were the results.



Do I Value Reconciliation?

Do you believe that reconciliation must first happen between God and man through the work and shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? Secondly, do you believe that we must seek reconciliation with his fellow man? Miguel is still working on this one. His mom and our workers have begun the process with some early success. Commit yourself to ministerial partnerships to reach city kids that include diverse individuals, agencies, and churches.

Well, how did you do? Which values were your strongest? Weakest? Regular check ups are good for staying healthy as you compete in this game. God places high value on city kids. So keep your game on and I'll see you next time on the inside.