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# BLESSING THE CHILDREN POST



## Caring for the Orphans & Widows

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## EMPOWERING A GENERATION BY KELKIAS L.

Eight years ago, I left my country (Ethiopia) and went to the United States. The moment I set my foot on the ground, it was like a parallel universe - two completely different realities. I love my country but I began to see it from a different perspective. I imagined all of the things that we could improve. In the U.S., I noticed many great institutions - places of learning where tomorrow's leaders are shaped. I admired the people who built them for generations. An immense passion began to burn inside of me; I wished one day my country and my people would change for the better. That education would be part of our culture and every child would be able to get it.

millions of hard working families all over the world. It demonstrates the typical struggle of many families to find quality and affordable education for their children. This is even truer in a country like Ethiopia where half of its citizens are under poverty line and quality education is scarce.



I live in a country with one of the highest illiteracy rates yet I appreciate the value of education. I am one of the four children in my family. While growing up, we never had a fancy life style. Born and raised in the outskirts of Addis Ababa to a family of humble background, the only things my parent could give us were unconditional love and a means to a moderately good education. My father is a hardworking man who never had the opportunity to go past grade

six. He lost his father at a very young age and therefore the burden of caring for his siblings and a mentally ill mother fell on him, forcing him to drop out of school and work as a day laborer to support his family. Yet, he always understood the value of education and he wanted his children to have something he didn't have growing up. Even if that meant sacrificing all of his life, hoping one day he might see his children become successful. I am forever grateful for what my parents have done for me and my sisters.

This is my story, yet it so closely resembles the stories of

In Ethiopia, education is the only way out of poverty, yet only the privileged few are able to afford good education. Only those who are born with a silver spoon in their mouth can get the best education in the country. The rest have to go through public schools, where one class is full of eighty, ninety or even a hundred students. Yet the poor are forced to send their children to these schools, fully knowing they might fall through the cracks of a broken system.

Eight years later, I returned to my birth country and to the same reality. But I ended up in a place where I can do something to help bring change. I am proud to say I serve with Blessing the Children and at The BCI Academy - a place founded by a visionary to empower a generation of Ethiopians, a place where the poor can afford a good education and an orphan without a helper has a chance at a future. So that people like my father - who value education but cannot afford it - could get an opportunity and equal head start to success. At BCI we believe in personal responsibility and self-sustainability as we empower the next generations of Ethiopians towards a bright future for themselves and for Ethiopia.



**KEITH V. STRAWN**  
FOUNDER & PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

Please join us in this edition of the Post for an article about the BCI Academy's Holiday Break Program. On the cover you'll find an article from BCI's own Director of Teams & Missionaries.

We have some pretty exciting news in our praise report this month and this edition's highlights feature pictures of our precious children working together!

Thank you for your support and continued prayers. Because of you, we are touching lives in Ethiopia.

Abundant blessings,

# HOLIDAY BREAK PROGRAM BY MARIANNE H.



After a couple weeks of studying and tests, the children of the BCI Academy had a week long break from school. During that break, we organized two holiday programs – one for the younger children and one for the teenagers. A majority of the children do not have many things to do during their break since very few have toys or the like to play with. Some of the children help their families with jobs, watch their little brothers or sisters while their mom is working or hang around the street. So we saw this break as a good opportunity for us to teach them from the Bible, to teach them some social skills, and to give them a fun time.

The first two days, we had a program for the teenagers of BCI and around 30 teenagers showed up. The children were divided into teams and each team made up their own team names and logos. Each day started with a team meeting and prayer. After that, the teenagers started their day with team building sessions in which each team could earn points by working together to do jobs around the school, like cleaning up the school, shining the leader's shoes, etc. These duties were mainly purposed to stimulate good behavior - no fighting, obey the leaders and participation. There was an amazing team-spirit during the sessions as everyone worked together to do the jobs and do them well.

After team building sessions, the teenagers were taught lessons from the Bible. The theme of the lessons was: 'Our God is greater' and the two Bible stories that were taught were Gideon and Jericho. Through the whole program, we tried to teach them how great our God is. The kids then received a balanced meal for lunch.

In the afternoon, we did workshop rounds with the teenagers. We wanted to challenge their creative talents,

something they are not often challenged on. Every teenager could choose a focus; there was music, drama and art. At the end of the second day, we had a little show – "BCI got talent" – in which the children could showcase what they had worked on in their workshops. The art workshop group showed the big painting they made, the music workshop group sang their song, and the drama workshop group did their drama.

On Thursday and Friday it was time for the younger children to come and join the holiday break program. They were also split into groups and participated in the team building sessions just like the teenagers. Their Bible story time was filled by a puppet play where the BCI social workers played a puppet skit with hand puppets. This was a big hit and the children loved the puppet show. They also had some time for singing and games. The children were then served lunch and in the afternoon, we did crafts and competitions. At the end of the second day, every team made their own drama and performed for the whole group.

During the days of the program, I was blessed to see a lot of smiles, laughter, and joyous children. While watching them run around and have fun, I would almost forget that they come from very hard backgrounds - mud huts, lack of food and clothing, and many broken families. I pray the children had the same wonderful experience that I did and that, even if just for a few days, *they could forget all their troubles and just enjoy being a child.*

For more pictures of the children during their holiday break program, please feel free to check out our blog!

<http://blessingthechildren.wordpress.com/>



Arts & Crafts



Fun & Games

# PRAISE REPORT: BASIC NECESSITIES

When you go to sleep at night and say your prayers, what do you thank God for? Do you thank Him for your family and friends, your job, your house, food to eat?

What about the mattress you're sleeping on? Many of us do not consider what a blessing it is to have a mattress to sleep on. It is such a basic necessity, yet one that many Ethiopians live without.

While most of us only use our beds at night time for sleeping, Henok, a 17 year old young man who is disabled from the waist down, spends the majority of his day in bed due to his disability. (For Henok's full story, you can see the link at the end of the article.)

Henok's mother is very poor and struggles to support Henok the best she can, but even with the small income she makes

as a daily laborer, she can not afford to buy him a mattress. To make him as comfortable as possible, Henok's mother took old flour sacks and filled them with straw. This is a sad situation, especially considering the amount of time Henok spends in his bed.

During a home visit to Henok, a missionary saw Henok's situation and felt led to provide Henok with not only a new mattress, but two new pillows, a set of sheets, and a blanket.

If the smile on their faces is any indication, both Henok and his mother are so very grateful for this unexpected and generous gift.

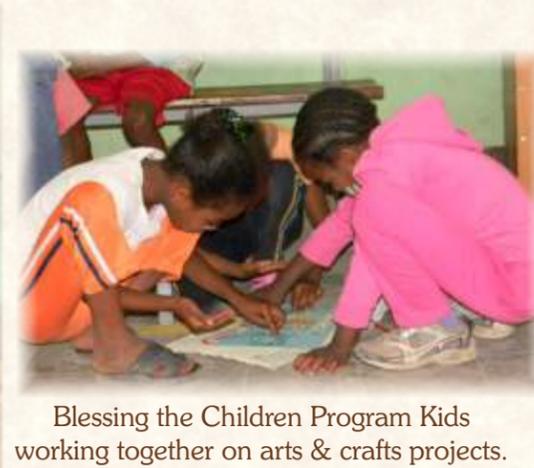
<http://blessingthechildren.wordpress.com/2012/07/16/but-the-lord-looks-on-the-heart/>



## HIGHLIGHTS

### WORKING TOGETHER

Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.



Blessing the Children Program Kids working together on arts & crafts projects.