

Is it Sympathy? Responsibility? Or Love?

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I never thought of going to Cambodia and did not feel good about this country. My only impression of Cambodia is Angkor Wat and the rubbish dump.

During the church mission prayer meeting, Pastor Siu invited Metta Mission & Community Ministry ("Metta") to share about their work in Cambodia. The sharing included a video which featured an older sibling begging with a child less than one year old on his/her back. I felt uncomfortable as children should be learning at school and playing happily rather than begging on the streets. I started to have 'compassion' for children in Cambodia. Our loving Heavenly Father has not forgotten the children there, bringing Metta to help them escape from begging, giving them a chance to go to school and to know Jesus Christ. After the prayer meeting, Pastor Siu invited me to organize a mission trip to Cambodia. As I felt that Metta's work was very meaningful and Tin Chuen Church has been seeking for missionary partners, therefore, I boldly promised him.



I was involved in many mission trips to China with a deep understanding that these trips cannot bring changes to the local instantly. Therefore, I went to Cambodia with compassion, hoping that children can have a happy Christmas and thinking that maybe our involvement could give the Metta staff a little support and encouragement. When we arrived at the centre, the children greeted us strangers with warm smiles on their faces and even ran towards us and hugged us. I considerate myself to be a passionate person, but I did not know how to react (they are more passionate than me!). So, without hesitation, I picked up the child. I even used my poor Khmer to greet them. Of course, they do not understand. But I thought, as long as they are happy, I am happy for them.

Almond, a Metta co-worker reminded us not to sympathize the children out of pity, they do not need our sympathy, they only need our love and treat them as ordinary children rather than labelling them. Her words were powerful, I logically kind of understood, but I am unsure what is sympathy, what is love? I reflected on Almond's words throughout the trip and hope that God can help me understand.

When I was serving with the Metta staff, I observed how they treated the children. There were two very touching moments:

We were playing 'Tag' outside, a chasing and catching game. The children ages range broadly. As the little ones could not run as fast as the older ones, they could not catch anyone. Whenever the Metta staff had a chance to help the little ones, they will give out a helping hand to assist them, so that they do not have to keep chasing around. It was a super touching moment for me.

One day when we were buying lunches on the streets, a kid came and begged for money. Almond immediately greeted the kid in Khmer and gave him some change to buy snacks. She asked the staff to go and check out the kid's situation. If I was Almond, what would I do? Maybe I would think that the centre is already full and there is no more space to accommodate the kid and there is no need to understand his situation. Or I would ask him if he had lunch, if he has not, I would buy him some food. But if there are too many children begging for money, I would not even ask.

As I was observing how Metta's staff treat the children, I was thinking what I would do if I was the staff, as if I understand the difference between sympathy and love. When I have sympathy for the kid, or when they are no longer underprivileged, I would probably not care for them. But if I love them, then it would not change no matter what their circumstances are.

From one of the devotional sharing during the trip, we discussed whether we joined the mission trip out of responsibility or love. At that moment, I thought it was out of love. After the trip, I gave it a second thought. I noted that it was responsibility that motivated me to join the mission trip, I had little love. But I know that we can cultivate love, it is not instant. If we never began, then how do we get the chance to cultivate?

PS: Metta's staff not only love the children, they even took care of the mission trip members. One day, Dy the co-worker had a gastrointestinal discomfort, but he accompanied us to visits and even took us out to buy souvenirs. He diligently helped us pick the limes too. That's love!