



The Phone Call

by Rodolpho Carrasco

In the early 1990s, I worked with a small cadre of urban youth ministers who were out to change the world. On staff at the Harambee Christian Family Center in Pasadena, Calif. (harambee.org), we were at the epicenter of urban need, watching all sorts of outreach and community transformation activities. We determined we wouldn't do it *that* way.

No more drive-by outreach, firing off Bible verses and making clothing drops as we sped into—and out of—communities. No more ministry by Scud missile, launching benevolence bombs from a safe distance, but never getting close enough to see if we hit the target. No more Gospel playboys, making spiritual babies via mass outreach events, but not staying around to raise those infants. We determined to disciple as Jesus had disciplined, living in community with each other and those we were teaching.

So we went for it. And we saw great transformation. We witnessed miracles of family change—parents coming to Christ and breaking generations of familial sin. We made advances in racial reconciliation in a community simmering with Black and Brown tensions. Youth believed that they could not only rise above their circumstances, but one day lead others who were not from their ethnic group or socio-economic class.

I thought I was doing it right. Then one September night, I got a phone call that brought me back to square one.

A young guy from Harambee was

calling from college. It was the second day of his freshman year. We had known he had college and leadership in him; it just took him a few years to believe it.

Twelve months previously, I had taken him with me to Cartagena, Colombia, for a youth church planting conference. One day, we took a short drive into a Cartagena slum. I looked at this young guy and said, "Any one of these people would probably give up a limb to trade places with you."

He didn't respond. But within a month of our return, it was evident that something had clicked. He began focusing on starting college and single-handedly cared for a house for teen guys that Harambee ran.

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His faith in Christ strong, his future in his hands, he went off to college. Then he called on the second night of school. I thought he needed something specific. But as we talked, I realized that something had changed. He was no longer the floundering 15-year-old I had met on the corner of Howard and Navarro. He was more like a nephew, a member of my family, seeking a little encouragement from back home.

That's when it hit me that deep down I still had a "project" mentality. When we think about projects, we think that one day the project will be completed and we can return to whatever we were doing before we started it. I'd thought I had eliminated "project" from my thinking.

When this young man got on the plane to go to college, I'd thought I heard the Lord saying, "Well done, Rudy, my good and faithful servant."

But I'd misheard. What He had actually said was, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:35)

And nephew.

It's a hard teaching. Most people at most times have known they can't rely on anyone but blood relatives. But that's not what Jesus advocates here.

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," Jesus said, when He taught us how to pray.

Christ says that our bonds to other believers are stronger than our bonds to our own blood relatives. He says that life

under this new set of rules begins not in the hereafter, but in the here and now.

I love community transformation ministry, because I'm not sure I would've been challenged to live out this deep

biblical truth without getting involved with people who are different from me. I don't think I would've wrestled with the words of Mark 3:35.

But now, I'm the better for this experience. This young man and I continue to walk together, not just me mentoring him, but him blessing my family as well.

Before that phone call, I'd thought I understood most of what there is to know about community transformation and urban ministry.

Thank God for that phone call.

As executive director of Harambee Ministries in Pasadena, Calif., Rodolpho Carrasco speaks about indigenous leadership development throughout the country. To dialog with him about this column, contact him at RCarrasco@OutreachMagazine.com.