

Children matter

By Kay F. Rader, Commissioner –

“. . .unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:2 TNIV).

Aboard the *President Wilson* ocean liner in San Francisco as freshly minted lieutenants, General Paul Rader (Ret.) and I were on our way to an overseas appointment in South Korea. Like Abraham, who by faith, left his own country without knowing where he was going (Heb. 11:8), we left our country, not knowing what would lie before us. Like Abraham, we were headed for a country where we would live as foreigners. How could we have imagined the linguistic and cultural challenges that awaited us? We had to experience it to believe it.

On reflection, I see that all the while God had a provisional plan. Unlike Abraham, who began his journey childless, ours began with two babies: Edie Jeanne, 2, and James Paul (J. P.), six months. God knows children matter. As Oswald Chambers wrote, “God became a baby.”

All the way across the Pacific Ocean, God was unfolding his plan. But first we would have to settle into our “stateroom.” While we wrestled with sub-standard accommodations, our Edie made friends. The first an orderly from China assigned to our part of the ship. Edie warmed to his middle-aged grandfatherly antics. They were buddies.

In Japan we were invited to join Salvationists for their Christmas party. Taking part in the fun and games was of no consequence to Edie, while baby brother calmly observed the festivities from the vantage point of his place beside a warm and welcoming jolly, old Japanese St. Nick. Ten days in Japan and we were off to Korea where once again our children settled in comfortably to the Asian context.

Salvationist colleagues greeted us on the platform of Seoul Station, along with the biting cold of a Korean January. But when the territorial headquarters Land Rover pulled up in front of our quarters, Edie enthusiastically lunged for the door, jumped onto the pavement and exclaimed, “Mommy, we’re home!” She has been at home ever since.

Within a few days she was trying out her newly acquired Korean words. When I told her to wear a sweater outside, she replied, “I don’t need sweaters. I have *yon tans* in my heart!” *Yon tans* are coal

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briquettes used by the Korean people to heat their homes and as a source of fuel for cooking. Edie's heart-held *yon tans* have sustained her throughout her many years of living and working in Korea.

While my husband and I were studying the Korean language, our children's ease with the language and culture helped span the chasms for us. God knew we needed these little ones. Children matter.

Our third child, Jennie, arrived as a Christmas gift. When the Korean children first caught sight of her, they were appalled at her Western appearance. "Oh no!" they sighed, "She's American!" But Jennie soon became one with them. She spoke Korean first, then English.

Edie, J. P., and Jennie, throughout childhood and now as adults, are Third-Culture People (TCP), an intriguing mixture of Korean and American. By the end 2016, all three, as well as some of their children and J.P.'s five grandchildren, will be living in Asia: Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Children matter to God. The Psalmist prays: "*Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength*" (Psa. 8:2a KJV).

Children matter to Jesus. *He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me"* (Mark 9:36-37a NIV).

Children matter to us. In cross-cultural situations such as ours, it was a blessing to have children along, effortlessly spanning cultural gaps. But they must not stand alone. They need our help as well.

[U.N. Refugee Agency](#) statistics tell us there are 59.5 million people worldwide who have been forcibly displaced from their houses—refugees. Half of the world's refugees are children. Who will welcome them? Who will make the effort to bridge the gap for them? Some see refugees as enemies, even children. Jesus followers love them.

I am grateful for the Salvationists in 14 European countries who are welcoming refugee children, providing warm beds, nourishing food and other amenities. The word on the streets of Europe is that Salvation Army people treat refugees with dignity and respect.

Newscasts often leave the impression that refugee children have extraordinary coping mechanisms. We need to remember that in their world, as David Ransom writes, "for every moment of fun, there is also lurking fear...for dreams there are also nightmares; for times of play, excruciatingly tiresome work."

Childhood is the future, not the past. As 18th century author, Novalis, says, "Where children are, there is a golden age."

On the walls of the London Children's Hospital are the words: "Remember the children, the dear precious children; Remember the children, each girl and each boy."

Rwandans say in Kinyarwanda: “tu-zi-ri-ka-na a-ba-na”; Georgians in Kartuk: “da-makh-so-vre-ba shvi-te-bi.” “Remember the children.”

Why? Because, everywhere and always, children matter.