

Power of prayer challenges the impossible

Two abduction cases. Two continents. One God.



Thomas Froese
ChristianWeek Columnist

OUT OF AFRICA

Jesus wept (John 11:35).

KAMPALA, UGANDA — Remember Kienan Hebert, the three-year-old in one of Canada's biggest feel-good stories of 2011? Kienan was abducted from his B.C. home and later returned by, of all people, his abductor.

Twitter and Facebook lit up. Christians proclaimed God is alive and well and listening to prayer.

One wrote the Toronto Star online: "To those who aren't aware that God answers prayer, I show you the return of Kienan Hebert. Now if we prayed on an ongoing basis for the protection of children and for those disturbed in mind and spirit, abductions like this would rarely occur."

Now come to Uganda and consider my personal top story of the year. It unfolded soon after Kienan's return, and also involved an abducted boy, a seven-year-old Ugandan likely to be killed in a ritual sacrifice.

His father, Richard, a family friend, phoned me in desperation after little Moses vanished from his village home. Richard cried for help like only a heartsick father can. My wife and I gave money for radio announcements. I e-mailed friends in Canada: "Please pray for Moses."

Like some others, I feared the worst. But just before midnight that night—before my e-mail appeals to Canada were even read—Moses was saved.

His abductors had put him on a truck, then a boda-boda (motorcycle taxi) that took him some hours



Richard Kaloulou with his seven-year-old son, Moses, at a celebration in Kampala, Uganda, after Moses was saved from an abduction. Hundreds of Canadians had prayed for his rescue.

Thomas Froese Photo

to the Ugandan-Kenyan border. But when border police saw the boy crying hysterically, the boda driver got nervous, left Moses and took off.

Police then brought the traumatized boy to a hospital. Days later, after hearing the radio ads, a politician phoned me. I called Richard. He went to the hospital. The miracle was complete.

When I later told Richard about hundreds of praying Canadians,

"Prayer is no magic wand. If it was, God wouldn't be God. We would."

he gently smiled and said, "I never knew."

Meanwhile, after I updated my friends, my inbox filled. Many said "Praise God!" Some said Moses was destined to become a great man. One friend said she literally cried. I later organized a celebration at a Kampala club, the first time Moses was ever in a swimming pool.

acknowledging juju can attract harm. And children in this culture aren't always respected. An educational cartoon strip in Uganda's national daily is tellingly called "We know you love your children, but ..."

So if courts and politicians don't push hard against ritual killings, if police aren't empowered, what chance does prayer have? As a spokesman for Uganda's Anti-Human Sacrifice Police Task Force put it, "We're limited."

Does this mean that prayer can't change the impossible? Not at all. I'm especially intrigued how prayer isn't bound by time. Those Canadian prayers for Moses, I believe, affected his rescue days earlier.

But prayer is no magic wand. If it was, God wouldn't be God. We would.

And when Christians pretend to know too many answers and not enough mystery, we don't help anyone. Sometimes it's better to simply cry with those who cry. Isn't that what Jesus did? He mourned our broken world.

Prayer should also never discourage us from using every human means at hand. The Christmas season reminds us of this, how when murder threatened young Jesus, his family fled.

For Kienan, that human means was an Amber Alert and media blitz. For Moses, it was screaming his lungs out. Thank God Moses did exactly that. And Someone heard.

Yes, thank God.

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