



Water Works for Malawi Gardens

Rural kids know something about gardens. At least, they understand gardens needing water. If it doesn't rain, they need water from somewhere. They also understand more about sacrifice than most of us. They taught us some of that during our Water Works Vacation Bible School.

Central Baptist Church – Lowesville is pretty rural. The mountain backdrop paints a beautiful view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Lowesville Road is a detour that goes precisely there and nowhere else. We are in the center of a rural farming community with orchards, a grist mill no longer operating, a chemical plant that closed down thirty-some years ago, and fields with a nice mountain view. Land prices are getting higher, but the community is not wealthy. It is not the place you would expect a big offering at Vacation Bible School.

There are a lot of things you might not expect. For one thing, a church averaging about 65 in worship does not normally host 62 children and youth for Vacation Bible School. For another, you don't expect children to grasp the needs of villagers in a far away country like Malawi.

Our Vacation Bible School this year had a water park theme. Since the suggested missions project was unrelated to the water theme, we decided to help Watering Malawi¹ instead. Watering Malawi is an organization partnering with groups like World Vision to alleviate a water crisis in the African country of Malawi. In a water rich nation, many villages do not have access to the land's abundant water supply. Village gardens do not grow for lack of rain and irrigation, placing over five million people on the brink of starvation. From Lowesville, VA to a village in Malawi, one village of 200 to another, a water treadle pump seemed like a great missions project. We set a goal of \$200.00 to purchase a water treadle pump for a Malawi village garden. The children thought larger than we did.

On the first night of Vacation Bible School, we showed a video clip on Watering Malawi and had a decent offering by children who had not known where the offering would go. By the third night, the children had raised more than enough to purchase a pump. Before the end of the week, we were hearing all sorts of stories of sacrificial giving. Piggy banks were raided, three-fourths of a birthday check was given, and one child asked parents for permission to give up his US Savings Bond. The children raised \$500. That was enough to pay for two-and-a-half pumps. The adults added to that at our commencement service, raising about \$850, more than four times our goal.

At \$8.06 per child, several of whom were only present for one evening, the children gave half as much as most Baptists give to overseas missions in an entire year. In our American reality, that is not a lot of money. Even so, because a few people in a rural community recognized the need to water village gardens, four villages somewhere in Malawi will have vegetables to put on the table and sell at market. Young girls from those villages will also be able to go to school rather than spend all day carrying water to meet their family's needs.

¹ <http://www.wateringmalawi.org>

For all their sacrifice, our children will not miss a meal. Their gifts will not deny them an education. They will still have food, clothing, shoes, beds, and homes. They just gave up some of the “extras” we take for granted. Our children’s offering was more than the annual income for an entire village whose garden we helped water.

The children had fun at Vacation Bible School. They got wet, they studied Bible stories, they made crafts, played games, memorized Bible verses, and ate theme snacks. They also did some teaching about faith, sacrifice, and God’s provision. I guess the question is whether we have learned anything from their example about God providing for the needs of others out of our abundance—and even our lack.

An offering of \$850.00 is not really a lot of money. For a few villages in Malawi, however, it will be a life-transforming gift. It’s a good thing that rural kids know something about watering gardens—and about sacrifice, too. Maybe next year we will spring \$6000.00 toward a borehole well.

For information on how you can water gardens in Malawi, go to www.wateringmalawi.com. Tell them what you learned from kids in rural Virginia.

—Christopher B. Harbin