

Precious Stones [inspired by Revelation 21:19-27 on December 6, 2005]



Prisca and daughter

Meet Prisca. She was raped by a man who believes the myth, sex with a virgin cures AIDS.

Prisca is a young 17 year old girl of very few words. However, do not let her quiet demeanor fool you.

She is a very smart and courageous girl who has had to grow up fast and take on adult responsibilities at a very tender age. In the past two years she has been mother and breadwinner to her two brothers, 13 and 11 years old.

Prisca's parents died when she was 15 years old. Upon their death, the parents had accumulated reasonable wealth which could have been sufficient, if properly managed, for the children's upkeep until they finished high school. Traditionally when parents die, the relatives inherit not just the wealth but the family of the deceased. However, due to the economic challenges Zimbabwe is currently facing, such well intended traditions are forcing people to take the inheritance and leave the children destitute. Zimbabwe has a rate of 80% unemployment and a constantly skyrocketing inflation, currently at 230 million percent (January 2009).

A little over a year ago a relative, who was suppose to be watching over the children, forced himself into the room where Prisca was sleeping and rape her. He raped her because he believes in the myth that sex with a virgin cures HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately for most orphans, this is a reality that the devastation of the epidemic has brought into their environment. Not only do they have to make do to survive but they live in a time where "it takes a village" is slipping away into oblivion. The children are being hurt by the very people who are supposed to protect them. Because she was threatened by the relative she was too afraid to tell anyone. So days went by and she continued to live life like

nothing had happened, at least until a month later when she missed her period. A neighbor noticed how withdrawn she had become and pressed her until she finally told the truth. The neighbor then reported the matter to the village elders but the case was never addressed. The man who violated her not only got away with the crime—to possibly go and do the same to the next

"Either I breastfeed her or I watch her die of starvation"

victim, but he left her with a lifelong reminder. Prisca was pregnant. Nine months later she gave birth to a baby girl who is now 10 months old. Although Prisca has never been officially tested for HIV infection, "All symptoms and illnesses point to HIV", relates Mrs. Juru, Dangwa Initiative's country coordinator. Even she believes she is infected but since there are no HIV test kits at the local clinic - which is about an hour and half walk away - she has no confirmation except for obvious lesions on her body.

Ethel, an Albany resident and Dangwa Initiative volunteer, visited Zimbabwe in April '08 and she had an opportunity to speak with Prisca. "When I was giving an HIV workshop to the girls at one of the schools, I noticed Prisca sitting in the back. Even though she had suspicious visible lesions, she was breastfeeding her child like all was normal". Later on after the workshop, Ethel states that she approached Prisca to confront her about possibly passing on the virus to her child. "What else can I do?" responded Prisca, "Either I feed her or watch her die of starvation". Needless to say, Ethel could not find words to react to that but cry. So if her baby had been lucky enough to escape the virus at birth, she is being out at risk of infection at every feed.

"What can I do for Prisca?" You ask. Her immediate tangible needs are:

- HIV testing and counseling. A kit that can test 100 people costs \$100.
- School fees for her two brothers, \$5 per month, respectively.
- Guaranteed meals at school, \$10/month per child.
- \$100 to start a vegetable garden that she and her family can eat but most importantly that she can sell to take care of the household needs. Her parents were one of the few who built a borehole at their homestead giving them access to a good supply of water.
- Clothes for herself, brothers and her baby.



Prisca, daughter and Ethel

Do you know?

- We currently serve 350 AIDS orphans (330 girls) in 14 Zimbabwean rural schools—5 of them are secondary schools.
- It costs an average of \$5/month to cover a child's educational expenses
- It costs \$10/month to provide a child with two nutritious meals a school day
- Teachers are paid less than \$100/month
- Parents are asked to supplement teachers' salaries with grocery items when they can hardly afford to buy for their own families.