

## The Backstory, as Seen by Gloria

One difficult day during a trip to Ethiopia and Tanzania with board leaders and friends of Lutheran World Relief, I stood helplessly at the hospital bedside of a 29-year-old woman. We saw firsthand during this trip many successes of the LWML Mission Grant: Lutheran Malaria Initiative (LMI). Sadly, on this day, we were witnesses to a mother of two children sinking into a malaria-induced coma. Bitten by a mosquito that was carrying malaria parasites, it took her too long to receive the medical attention she needed. Frankly, I was angry! At a visceral level, I sensed the injustice that is associated with diseases intensified by poverty. The rural poor can live or die based on access to health care and whether they receive basic education about the symptoms of malaria.

It can be easy for us, as people who care about the lives and health of people around the world, to get angry at the injustice of a disease that is easily treatable. Anger itself is not an inappropriate reaction, but it can lead to inaction — or self-righteous zealotry — if we don't remember the One who gave Himself for us. "The darker crime is to make a career of conscience," wrote the poet Derek Walcott.

# The Reason "Because"

By John Nunes and Gloria Edwards

*Open with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to open your hearts to the incomprehensible depth of God's love.*

### Jesus Cares for the Sick

Read and discuss **Mark 1:40–45**\*. In the time that Jesus lived and taught, lepers were considered highly unclean and were not to be approached.

When Jesus heals the leper, not only does He show that He is the Son of God, but also that He is "moved with pity." Jesus sees the suffering of the leper and simply wants to relieve it.

Compare the account above with **Luke 7:11–15**. In this account we see that Jesus *had compassion on her* [*the mother*], even though touching the bier (casket) would render Jesus ceremonially unclean. The Greek word for compassion is *splagchnizomai* — literally, "his gut moved." What correlation is there between pity and compassion? Compare translations; what other words are used to convey Jesus' care?

Think about a time when God's deep care for another person's health and well-being encouraged you to go well beyond human and cultural boundaries.

Read **John 11:33–35**. When Jesus' friend (and brother of Mary and Martha), Lazarus, was ill and died, Jesus was moved to tears at Lazarus' graveside. This is one of only two times when Jesus wept; the other occurs when Jesus weeps over Jerusalem following His triumphal entry. Read **Luke 19:41–44**. Jesus' weeping is not a loud lamentation (Greek: *klaio*), but rather He "shed tears" (Greek: *dakryo*) as His heart goes out to those who mourn and encounter suffering and destruction. Recall a time when you were moved to tears out of love for a friend.

How do these biblical accounts demonstrate God's love for us and for all people? What is surprising about these accounts? What would have been surprising to people witnessing these events?

### Our Response to God's Love

Read **1 John 4:19**. We love because God first loved us — *because* this God, rich in mercy, has demonstrated infinite love to us. Reflect

*\*All references taken from ESV*





for a moment on **Ephesians 2:4–6**. As God has “made us alive together with Christ” and saved us by His grace, so too can we share this saving grace with others. In what other ways can we demonstrate our joyful response?

By faith, we cling to the lasting promise delivered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By faith, we claim as our own the promise spoken over Joseph: *because the Lord was with him ... the Lord made it succeed* (**Genesis 39:23**).

### How Can I Help?

**PRAY** for all those who are suffering, including those around our world who are suffering from malaria, and for those working to prevent, treat, and contain the disease.

**LEARN MORE** about malaria and then tell everyone you know — family, friends, your congregation, and community. Go to the Mission Grants page at [www.lwml.org](http://www.lwml.org) and learn more about the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, Kenya, East Africa.

**GET INVOLVED** by inspiring and inviting people to participate. Think about your congregation, school, ministry, family and friends. Support this and other LWML Mission Grants with your mites and prayers.

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# What is malaria?

Malaria, a life-threatening disease caused by a parasite, is transmitted only through the bites of malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Once in the human body, these parasites migrate to the liver where they mature and multiply, enter the bloodstream, and then infect red blood cells. From there, the parasites rupture and infect more red blood cells.

The first symptoms of malaria usually occur between 10 and 15 days after infection and include fever, headache, chills, nausea, and vomiting — symptoms similar to a common flu virus. Unfortunately, if left untreated, malaria quickly becomes life-threatening.

### Who is at risk?

Approximately half of the world's population is at risk for malaria, with most cases and deaths occurring in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Health Organization, there are more than 200 million cases of malaria each year and, of those infected, nearly one million die.

While mosquitoes bite everyone, children, pregnant women, and their unborn babies are most vulnerable because of weakened or insufficient immune systems. In many parts of Africa, malaria remains the leading cause of death for children under five.

Yet prevention and treatment can be easy. Providing insecticide-treated bed nets and educating families on the need to use them can drastically reduce the risk of infection. Treatment itself can be relatively cheap and easy if people know what symptoms to look for and have access to medical care.