



CLEAN WATER | COMING TO RWANDA SOON

BY JEFF SHINABARGER

IT WAS A NIGHTMARE. I DREAMT OF A BOY, ABOUT 8 YEARS OLD, 4 FEET TALL, NO SHIRT, ONLY RIPPED UP, MUD-STAINED PANTS, WITH A BIG LITTLE BELLY. I STILL CAN'T REMEMBER WHAT HIS FACE LOOKED LIKE. IT WAS LIKE A HYPE WILLIAMS MUSIC VIDEO WHERE HE FOCUSES ON THE SUN GLEAMING AROUND THE PRODUCT HE WANTS YOU TO SEE. SUDDENLY THE ANGLE OF THE SUN MOVED AND AN EMPTY GLASS OF WATER APPEARED. THE BOY LEANED DOWN TO FILL THE GLASS AGAIN, AND THE SHOT PANNED BACK IN A CINEMATIC STYLE. I WATCHED THE BOY DIP THE GLASS INTO A FILTHY PUDDLE ON A MUD STREET. HE TOOK ANOTHER DRINK. I WOKE UP.

It was 3:27 in the morning. I was sweating. I went to the kitchen, filled up a glass of ice water from my refrigerator door, and took a drink. I woke up my wife Andre. I had dreamt of injustice. Rwanda Clean Water Project began.

That nightmare birthed in me a real world dream to bring clean water to Rwanda. I shared the idea with my good friend, Gabe Lyons, who gave it legs. He located a foundation partner to help us receive money and send it on to our implementation partners in Rwanda.

We decided to launch the idea of bringing clean water to Rwanda at an event called Catalyst in October 2005. On one particular morning, when approximately 8,000 church leaders entered the conference center, every person was given a bottle of water—no explanation, no tag, no branding, no cost, just pure clean water. Then we shared the story of the need for clean water in Africa. We take clean water for granted in America. The reality is, if there were clean water in developing countries today, the number of sicknesses literally would be cut in half. In a span of ten minutes, the leaders responded by giving \$105,000!

In the spring of 2006, a group of 15 of us went to Rwanda to assess the progress

of the first wells that had been dug since that 10-minute offering. The following account is what I wrote the day we met the families that were benefiting from the existence of these new wells:

Wells. We all saw the child that pumped the well and balanced the tin of water on his head and posed for us to take pictures. He was only one of many that gained from the well. From that one well alone, there are 2,999 others that smile just like him every day. That was one of the proudest and most humbling moments of my life. We saw how the simplest modern convenience can change the health and hope of an entire village. This is such a simple act, yet it could change humanity today. What if we worked to give everyone in the entire world an opportunity to have access to clean water? Can you imagine the smile on that child's face multiplied by millions of smiles from all over the world? Now that would be priceless. A small offering has the ability to change a society.

We came home and were humbled by how many lives were changed and how little we did to make such a substantial difference for thousands of people in Rwanda. Yet millions more still don't have the luxury that I have of clean water every day. What if we could do more? What if more families had access to clean water? Those were the questions we asked as we left Rwanda.

Since that trip to Rwanda, we have collaborated with individuals and churches all over the nation that have grasped the importance of clean water. Together, we have raised \$440,000 toward clean water in Rwanda. Our goal is to raise \$1 million. As this dream becomes a reality, I continually reflect on three powerful concepts I have learned along the journey:

COMMON GOOD PROJECTS UNIFY PEOPLE

Thirty kids made beautiful artwork on ceramic pitchers that they sold on Ebay. In Alabama, the Cove United Methodist Church collected a free will offering on a Sunday morning that totaled \$70,000. A coffee shop in Orlando found a matching donor for a fundraiser at their business and raised \$12,000. We are partnering with high-profile celebrities and executives on a film that will be released in 2008 about the global need for clean water. We recently connected with an entrepreneur from Boulder, Colorado committed to the teaching of Gandhi, who was extremely excited about the project.

N.T. Wright explains in *Simply Christian*, "We all share not just a sense that there is such a thing as justice, but a passion for it, a deep longing that things should be put to rights."¹ The story of Rwanda Clean Water is shared

WE SAW HOW THE SIMPLEST MODERN CONVENIENCE CAN CHANGE THE HEALTH AND HOPE OF AN ENTIRE VILLAGE. WHAT IF WE WORKED TO GIVE EVERYONE IN THE ENTIRE WORLD AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER?

by the gifts from thousands of individuals. Rwanda Clean Water is comprised of people of different convictions theology, age, religion, and location working together to better humanity. Clean water is an essential to life. All people agree. Justin Dillon, creator of “The Concert to End Slavery,” refers to this form of solution as an “open-source project.” Humanity is suffering. This is a global concern that all can agree on and work together to meet the needs. Unifying for the common good is a great lead-in for Christians in our day-to-day conversations.

CLEAN WATER CREATES SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

We are all aware of the genocide that resulted in millions of deaths in Rwanda. Thirteen years later, they are restoring friendships through conversations and grace. In his book *Fabric of Faithfulness*, Steven Garber says, “Community is the context for the growth of convictions and character.” If this is true, then we need to help create simple, community-driven environments, where convictions and character can be reclaimed.’² When I visited one of the new wells in Rwanda, I noticed hundreds of people walking for up to three miles with these unforgettable yellow jugs. Every day, a person from every family will walk or ride a bike to the well to get water for the day. In the book that Starbucks uses as mandatory reading, *The Great, Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg refers to this idea as “The Third Place.” It is a social environment separate from home and work that is important for “civil society, democracy, civic engagement, and establishing feelings of a sense of place.”

In the hills of Rwanda, the well is “the third place,” where everyone gathers. It is the hub of the social network. Through clean water locations, healing to individuals is happening daily. Conviction and character is being restored. In his brilliant book, *Deep Economy*, Bill McKibben thinks growth in developing countries, “should concentrate on creating and sustaining strong communities, not creating a culture of economic individualism.” Clean water will forever be an essential in the lives of not only individuals, but it also offers a place for developing deeper relationships in the Rwandan community.

INFLUENCE IS GAINED BY DOING SOMETHING

The most difficult element of moving an idea into motion is starting. Yet, when a great idea is launched, influence quickly follows. The dream that woke me up that night was about one little boy, yet thousands of people have joined in the initiative and thousands of Rwandans have benefited from one boy. Rwanda Clean Water has gained attention from media, churches, and cultural leaders because we did something. Everyone has an idea, but few people move that idea into reality. When creators move from idea to action, people will follow. Don’t search for influence. Don’t care

who gets the credit. Search yourself. Find what moves you. Discover a place of need. Authentically pursue a vision that helps humanity. Use the gifts you have been given. Influence will follow at the moment when you can handle the responsibility.

JOIN RWANDA CLEAN WATER PROJECT

As encouraging as this project has been to me, most people in rural Rwanda still do not have access to clean water. Women and young children walk for miles to fetch water from swamps and dirty rivers with buckets and canisters. It is amazing that with a simple gift of money we can literally save lives, decrease illnesses, and create sustainable communities.

We are looking for 300 churches to join a growing community in raising funds to bring clean water to Rwanda. Give \$3000 to Rwanda Clean Water and 750 people will receive the simple gift of drinking clean water for the rest of their life. Your community, your family, your neighborhood, and your friends can work together to raise the funds that will forever change lives. Please join us in providing clean water to Rwanda. **C**

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Jeff Shinabarger is a big idea guy, acting as creative director and experience designer for all Fermi Project initiatives, and editor of Fermi Words, a digital media magazine educating leaders on shaping culture. Jeff was also a creative mind behind the Catalyst Conference where he was the lead experience designer for three years and Executive Editor of the Catalyst GroupZine. He recently started giftcardgiver.com to shape a new form of giving to those in need. Jeff lives in East Atlanta, Georgia with his wife, Andre, and dog Max.

