



FIRST-PERSON: International crime victim

By David Sills
Nov 29, 2006

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--In one sickening moment, I realized that the thieves had taken my only connection with the outside world. By "the outside world," I mean the English-speaking, police-patrolled comfort zone I had left behind in the United States. By "connection," I mean my quad band, e-mail enabled cell phone.

My wife and I had gone to Latin America for a vacation to celebrate our anniversary. One evening we were taking the Metro to the national fine arts theatre to enjoy an evening of beautiful Mexican culture, music and traditional folk dances. As we boarded the Metro car I sensed, more than felt, my cell phone being taken. As I looked at the empty holster, I felt a sinking feeling that was like a punch in the gut.

I followed the man I thought was the thief when he got off the car, waved over the first security guard I saw and confronted him. Of course, he had already passed the phone to his accomplices (in fact, it was probably already in service with another phone number by the time the concert started!). I was filled with conflicting emotions. I knew that I needed to turn the other cheek but I also wanted to confront in a revenge-gratifying way. I also knew that I had my wife with me and my first duty was to protect her, not my macho image and ego.

I do not want to complain too much. I realize that everyone has been a crime victim at some level somewhere sometime. However, along with all the concomitant feelings of being a victim -- outrage, righteous indignation, personal violation, a sinful desire for revenge -- that are so common in such moments, being the victim of crime while in another country brings a host of other feelings crashing down as well. You feel vulnerable and exposed. You suspect ALL of the nationals and begin to paint them all with the same brush -- crooks, liars, opportunists! You begin to fantasize about sting operations to "nail the scum." I confess that I briefly enjoyed imagining a cell phone feature that allows you to remotely explode the device in case of theft. I was not thinking about anything big -- you know, just maybe something like a surgical strike napalm explosion that would only take out the thief. By God's grace, these feelings passed before design and development plans began.

Our family has not suffered too much in our time in various countries overseas. Yet sadly, I have friends who have been killed, or had family members killed, or been robbed at gunpoint, or had their houses repeatedly burglarized, and lived under constant threat of more of the same. Although two thugs once robbed my daughter at knifepoint, most of what we have suffered has been mere petty thefts. God has really been good to us considering that U.S. ex-patriots are wealthy in comparison to the general population and therefore prime targets.



David Sills

After I had time to pray it through and repent of my initial anger, I began to seek the mind of Christ in the matter. My mind went back to a story I had read of the Puritan Matthew Henry's response to being robbed, and his attitude became my challenge and goal. After considering his situation, he said, "I thank Thee first because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth because it was I who was robbed, and not I who robbed." Ouch.

The more I sought to embrace and adopt this attitude, the easier I found it to pray for conviction and salvation for the perpetrators. I remembered that there are over 1 million kids living on the streets in Mexico City. They barely survive day-to-day by stealing, scamming, taking part in prostitution and joining gangs. And, the young men who robbed me were the products of the street. The next thought I had is the one that has stayed with me. God reminded me of the heavy burden He placed on me for the lost souls of Latin America many years ago. I have had a missionary heartbeat for Latinos in the Americas for most of my adult life. Reflecting on that added even more shame to my initial reaction to the theft. People live out what is inside; lost people will always act like lost people. They desperately need the Gospel and there is no other hope for them -- or their societies. Theft, murder, hatred, lying and a multitude of other sins are evidence of their need to hear the Truth and be saved.

I am back in my comfort zone now. I have a new cell phone. My life picked up right where it left off when I departed for Mexico -- except for the burden I carry for the lost souls who live in darkness, killing and being killed, stealing to eat and worshipping whatever they think will assist their survival odds. The volume seems to be turned way up on that now.

I am thankful that at the end of my emotional roller coaster I was reminded of my burden to reach and teach people who live and die without Christ. May God grant us all a burden to see the events of our lives through His eyes. As Bob Pierce, founder of the Korean Children's Orphanage, World Vision and Samaritan's Purse, said 50 years ago, "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." Amen.

--30--

David Sills is associate professor of Christian missions & cultural anthropology and director of the Great Commission Center at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

[[Back to Previous Page](#)]