

Excerpt from *Divine Collision* by Jim Gash

Henry and his brother Joseph were imprisoned at a juvenile detention facility for a murder they didn't commit. This excerpt reveals Henry's heart and prayers shortly before Jim Gash and the legal team from Pepperdine first arrived.

At 9:00 p.m. each evening, Bo led the prisoners in a few songs he'd learned growing up in church. Most of the kids already knew the songs, and even the Muslim prisoners eventually joined in. Occasionally, Rose would hammer on the door and yell at them to be quiet. "God is not listening to you," she would scoff.

After Rose's interruptions, they would wait a few minutes, and then resume singing more softly. Henry and Joseph often read from the Bible, and someone would close the night with a prayer.

As the months wore on, however, and the brothers "celebrated" one year at Ihungu in July of 2009, Henry's faith began to waver again. He still sang, read from the Bible, and prayed, but it was more rote than real. Every week or two, Henry asked Mr. William if he had any updates. He never did.

The mobile phone the Katikiro (*the boy designated as leader of the other juvenile prisoners*) was permitted to have allowed Henry to stay in more frequent contact with his mother. His father still languished in the Hoima jail. Meanwhile, Henry's mom had sold all but three of the cows and was struggling mightily to make ends meet. She visited Henry and Joseph less often to save on transport costs, and there was even talk of Herbert dropping out of primary school for want of school fees.

Through it all, Henry's mother seemed unshakable in her faith. Henry wondered if it was all an act, but nothing suggested it was. As August became September, Henry felt the fog of depression rolling back in. By early October, Henry was barely clinging to his faith, and was contemplating letting go entirely.

If only God would send a sign, Henry thought, he'd have a reason to maintain hope.

October 12, 2009 (from Henry)

Every month or two, Mr. William brought visitors to Ihungu. Some were students from a university in Kampala. I liked talking to them because it allowed me to imagine going to university like them. They asked us questions about the charges against us and how long we had been at Ihungu. I asked them questions too— where they had gone to secondary school, what they were studying, and what university was like. Most were studying social work, and they said they would come back to help us. At first, I believed them. But they never came back.

Some of the other visitors were from what Mr. William called "NGOs"—organizations from other countries who helped poor Ugandans. A few times, I talked to these people. They also said they would come back and help us. They never did.

In October, Mr. William brought some visitors from an NGO. One of the boys told me two "mzungus" were with Mr. William. Mzungu means white-skinned foreigner in Swahili. I saw them through the hole in the door of the custody. One foreigner was about 50 and one was about 25. Both were very tall.

The mzungus walked around with Mr. William and talked to some of the prisoners. Mr. William translated for them when they asked questions. I did not go outside to talk to them. I believed these mzungus were just like the others; they would say things to give us hope, but they would do nothing to help us.

After they left, Mr. William sat down with me on my mat. He knew I was sad and losing hope. He put his hand on my arm and looked into my eyes. He said, "The men who just left are lawyers from America. They said they had heard there were many juvenile prisoners here waiting a long time for a trial. I told them many have been waiting for more than one year. They said they would come back and help."

I reminded him about the others who said the same thing. "This is no different," I told him.

"No, Henry. You are wrong this time. These men are different. I can tell." I could see in his eyes and hear in his voice that he believed them. My heart started beating very fast. "Do you really think they will come back?" I so wanted to believe this was true. I wanted to have hope again.

"I do, Henry. We must pray very hard."

I found Joseph, Jamil, and Bo and told them what Mr. William said. We prayed together that the mzungus would come back. We prayed every day, and we prayed very hard. We also fasted one day each week until the mzungus returned.

I called my mom and asked her to pray the mzungus would come and help us. She said she would ask everyone at church to pray also.

For the first time since I had arrived at Ihungu, I truly believed God was hearing my prayers. He had

sent me a sign.