

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

CHILD SPONSORSHIP SUNDAY

AARON BROCKETT | MAY 19, 2024

Well, it's so good to be with everybody today gathering across all of our locations and those of you joining us online. I have been so excited for this day. Today's a really, really special day. First of all, because the Pacers are going to knock out the Knicks in Game 7 here's just a couple hours. And the second, most important reason, it's Compassion Sunday! All right. There we go. That was called the pastoral setup. You guys passed.

But if you are relatively new to our church, Compassion Sundays are a big deal around here. And let me just kind of tell you what it is. Really there are three big things that I have been coming into today praying that would happen.

First thing is we just want to introduce you to, or reacquaint you, to one of our strategic ministry partners, Compassion International. Now, maybe many of you are familiar with them and what they do, their incredible work around the world. Others of you, maybe this is the first time you've heard about them, but we just want to introduce you to them. We have compassion representatives at every single campus today. So out in the lobby, you can just stop, get a chance to meet them, talk to them, encourage them because they just do some really incredible work.

The next thing that I'm praying will happen is I just want you to see, if you never have before, just want to build out a bit of a theological framework for what the scriptures have to say about the church's responsibility to care, primarily for vulnerable children. It's just all over the scriptures. And so I want to show you that.

And then the third and perhaps the most important thing is really this. We're doing child sponsorships today, but that's just a byproduct of what happens with this. I'm not asking you necessarily the first thing to fill out a packet and sponsor a child without first doing this. I just want the disposition of your heart to be open to whatever God might want to say to you today. That you just be like God, I don't know if I'm going to sponsor a child today, or maybe you already sponsor kids, or maybe you work with another organization. I mean, that is great. What I want to ask you to do is not tune that out or to shut that off. I want you to go, God, I'm listening. Please speak. What do you want to say to me? What do you want to do through me? What do you want me to feel? What needs do you want me to be aware of? Man, if you can do that, regardless of whatever happens else today, man, it's a really, really good day.



And so here's where I want to begin. I just want you to see that all throughout the scriptures at the very heart of the gospel message is that in and through Christ Jesus, God becomes a father to the fatherless. And you and I, without him, were fatherless.

Psalm 68:5 says that God is a father to the fatherless. Deuteronomy 10:18, God defends the cause of the fatherless. Psalm 146 verse nine, God sustains the fatherless. You could go Romans chapter 11, how it describes that you and I have been grafted into the family tree of God. And now we have been adopted as sons and daughters into the family with full rights through our dad's inheritance. I love what it says in the book of Hebrews. It says, man, because of God's grace, you can approach the throne of His mercy and grace with confidence because you're part of the family. You could go Romans chapter eight, verses 12 through 17. You could look at Galatians 3, 26. And then you go to the very next chapter, verses five through seven. You could go Ephesians 1:5. I'm just pouring all these scripture verses that you, you might write those down and just look them up later because it is a theme all through the scriptures.

Here's the second thing I want you to know, is that one of the defining characteristics of the early Christians, the very first church, was that they became known as those who would take in and take care of vulnerable children. And the need was significant in the Greek and Roman society of the first century. In fact, there was a widespread legal, which is heartbreaking that it was legal, and horrifying practice in ancient Greece in Rome, known as *expositio*, meaning there was an exposing or offering up, that's another word for abandoning, infants to the elements where they would either die from exposure or wild animals, or to whoever might take them in, which at the time mostly was slave owners. And according to the laws of the time, fathers actually had a right to kill their children for any reason at all until they came of age.

But the first generation of Christians stepped into these dire circumstances and rescued those children, raising them as their own in great acts of self-sacrifice. In fact, one historian said it this way, indeed the Christian church gained such a reputation for their care of exposed infants that churches became known for and the established sites for those who had abandoned infants. And the fact that they would just leave them at the door and the church would take them in and take care of them.

Now, because of the theological framework and because of the history around that and because of the great need that continues to exist in our world today, this has just become a huge priority for us as a church. You'll hear us say it all the time, that we want to step in and care for vulnerable children in our city and around the world, not just financially, but physically and spiritually.

And a vulnerable child, the definition of that, is one who lacks physical, emotional, spiritual and educational needs and the needs are great. On a global scale, one in six



children currently lives in extreme poverty. Many of these children live in unsafe areas with lack of access to clean water, sufficient food and proper hygiene and care. And God has always called upon his people to look after the most vulnerable.

In Exodus 22, verse 22, it says, do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. The prophet Isaiah would say it this way in chapter one verse 17, learn to do right, seek justice, defend the oppressed, take up the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. And that's what we love about Compassion International is that they do all of those things and they come alongside of local churches to help us do the very same thing as well.

Our relationship with Compassion began back in 2018 and the first weekend that we ever did like a child sponsorship, like what we're going to do here in just a moment, was on Easter weekend of 2018. That's when we did child sponsorships. If I'm not mistaken, I think we were the first church to ever do child sponsorships on Easter. And they thought it was a little bit unorthodox at first and my line of reasoning was, hey man, this is the highest attended weekend of the year. We got people that only come to church once a year, let's get them to sponsor a child while they're here. And man, it worked. We sponsored nearly 5,000 kids in Peru and Brazil back in 2018. And I know our family sponsored a couple of kids. I know many of you, that's when you jumped in and you began to sponsor kids and you're still sponsoring them, bringing hope and speaking life into these kids. But I also know that God changes circumstances and a whole bunch of you are brand new to our church. And we just got this on a rotation where we've got two partners that do child sponsorships, Missions of Hope International in Kenya, and we sponsor kids in Kenya, and then Compassion International in Peru. And so we just do it on a rotation. We just sponsor with both, if you had that question in your mind.

And then one of the things that I love about Compassion, this is really, really important. So we're not just sending money to these kids in Peru. We have as a church helped plant four churches in Peru because every child needs a church. And once these churches are planted, they come alongside of these children and these families in these communities, and they begin what's called a Compassion Center that just served hundreds of kids. And today I want you to know that through your generosity, there are now 937 children and youth participating in Compassion's holistic program through the four churches that you all helped plant. And yeah, man, we can celebrate that. And this past November, some of our staff went over to Peru to visit one of our church plants and just to see the difference that it's making and just how you're moving the needle through your generosity. This area, they have no access to municipal services, such as piped water or sanitation. But right now, that facility that we've completed has five classrooms, a kitchen, office space, and bathrooms for boys and girls. On the trip, we were able to meet the pastors and pray over the whole staff that is loving and pouring into the lives of those in that community.



At Compassion, they work to bring churches and these kids that are in desperate need together, not just to tangibly meet needs, but to really provide service to the whole child, mind, body, and soul. And one of the driving engines of that is child sponsorship. Through \$43 a month, a child is sponsored and then we make a commitment to that child to help them emerge through that. Oftentimes, what it is, it's a process of poverty and the sponsor provides financial and emotional support to the child by encouraging healthy, holistic development.

So when you become a sponsor, you're personally connected to that child. And one of the most important aspects of that is just letter writing. And by writing letters, you're encouraging that child, you're letting them know that somebody loves them, they care that they are seen, and they can break free from the cycle of poverty and realize they're full potential in Jesus.

I love what Compassion says. They say, children don't just need our resources, they also need our voice. And if I could just give you some of the dire statistics that are out there right now, many of you may be familiar with some of this. Currently, right now in the world today, one in six children lives in extreme poverty. Children are twice as likely to live in poverty than adults. A child who experiences poverty is more than three times as likely to experience multi-generational poverty as an adult.

Compassion currently serves more than 2.2 million children in 29 countries alongside 8,000 churches with over 70 years of experience serving children in Jesus' name. Children qualify to be a part of the Compassion program when their families make less than \$3.25 a day. That's about \$100 a month. Compassion-supported children. Here's the difference that it makes. They are up to 40% more likely to finish secondary education, up to 80% more likely to graduate from college, up to 75% more likely to become leaders in their communities, up to 18% more likely to have salary employment in their adult years. They spend, on average, 4,000 hours in safe nurturing programs.

Currently in Peru today, there are 3,000 children that are in need of sponsors, and our team has been praying that we can make a huge dent in that number today. Over 80% of surveyed Compassion graduates say that communication from their sponsor gave them hope, made them feel loved, and helped them to learn about Jesus. And I want you to hear the story of a couple who decided to sponsor a little girl in the Dominican Republic named Nujerling, and I just want you to see their story, so please turn your attention to the video.

[VIDEO]



Pete and Sarah Bulinski are pilots who specialize in midair plane refueling. They sponsored a child from the Dominican Republic, a commitment that transformed both her life and their own. Just as they fuel vital missions, their sponsorship fueled Nujerling's dreams.

When Pete and I were initially looking to sponsor Nujerling, we went on Compassion's website, and it said that she wanted to be a nurse, and we thought this is awesome. We want to help make this come true for her.

MUSIC

The conditions were so poor there in the whole area that she lived in, that they didn't have sanitation systems, and when it rained, the water would just come into the houses, and her shoes would get ruined, and so they had to wear bags for shoes. But she said, when she came to Compassion, they bought them shoes, and they gave them notebooks, and school supplies, and so what a huge difference Compassion had made in her life.

I think Nujerling has always been a dreamer, right? And she didn't let poverty define who she was. And now she started school, and we continue to sponsor her. She continued to excel and decided she wanted to be a doctor. And so she continued on with medical school, and not only did she want to be a doctor, she decided she wanted to be a neurosurgeon, and we were like, whoa, a brain surgeon. We literally are sponsoring a brain surgeon.

I think she is the woman that I always want to be, right? Like, she inspires me. Honestly like there was nothing that she couldn't do, right, that she must her mind to. So just whenever she needed a little bit more to help along the way, it just seemed, yeah, like no brainer.

Director: "No brainer was a good pun."

Did it on purpose!

You did?

No.

You would, though. You like puns.

Things that she did, most people wouldn't even dream of. And then if they did dream of it, they'd be too scared to even try it. And then if they did try it, and they got some of the



obstacles put in front of them that she had, they would have given up. The things that she came up with, she was relentless, she persevered, she sacrificed. And we just got to be like a front-row seat watching all of this happen, and just be incredibly impressed by her all the time.

I just thought it was crazy every time she comes back and like, hey, I want to do this new thing, or I want to go to Venezuela, do this next step or Japan, do this next step, and I was just like, get a girl!

She's a brain surgeon. I don't know what else to say. Like, she's... It's crazy. We've gotten to see Nujerling a few times. My kids love her, and any time they know that they get to see Nujerling, they are just ecstatic. 15 years ago, we signed up to sponsor a child. But in the process of that, we've gained a new member of our family, and she's changed our perspective on life.

I think a misconception that some people have about sponsorship is they think it's about them saving another person or helping another person. But in reality, what we've discovered is it's about God changing us. Obviously helping that other person, but we are different people, we are better people because of this program. Sponsoring a child is like telling them that you are worthy of the dreams in your heart.

MUSIC

[END VIDEO]

Isn't that an amazing story? Isn't that incredible? Well, it is my honor to let you know that we actually have Nujerling with us today. So would you please give a warm Traders' Point, welcome at all of our locations to Dr. Nujerling Vargas.

APPLAUSE

Come on, man. Come on! Amazing, amazing.

[INTERVIEW WITH PASTON AARON AND NUJERLING]

Aaron: Well, Dr.

Nujerling: You can just call me Nujerling

Aaron: Thank you, Nujerling, so much for being here. Honestly, it's just our honor that you would take the time out of your busy schedule to fly and be here. You flew in yesterday. You got stuck in customs and immigration in New York for an hour, so



welcome. And it really is just a thrill to have you with us today, just being able to get a bit acquainted with you both last night and then all morning through these services. You're just such a lovely person, and it's just so great to see you and have you with us today.

Can you just tell us a little bit about where you grew up and what were just some of the circumstances around just your early childhood?

Nujerling: First, thank you very much for the invitation to be here today. I feel very honored every time I can speak for Compassion and help in the King of God grow every day. So I've warned the Dominican Republic in the north of the country, because of the lack of jobs my parents have to move to the east. The east is the area of the sugar cane fields. It used to be full of slaves. After the slave was done, so they hired Dominicans to work in the sugar cane fields to produce the sugar. So there's a village, so there's not like a real community. So when we moved there, there was no pavement in the street. There was no sanitary system or clean water. We have to walk very far to pick up the water from the river, very far from the house. And also it was a huge house like cutting in pieces for each family, but we don't have sanitary system inside the house. We have something called letrina. I don't know if you ever hear about that.

Aaron: I've used one, yeah.

Nujerling: So you have to go outside the house to kind of use the washroom. Something to say there was no over light, so we don't have lights either. So everything was dark even when I go to the washroom.

So at school we have school, but at school was almost two hours walking from our houses. So most of the kids, including me and my brothers, have to go to school, but we don't have shoes. So sometimes we use a plastic bag on our feet, so we don't feel so hot while we walk, and sometimes we just don't use nothing. And even in rains, some of the waters get inside the house because of the roof has holes, and I think it was the same outside and inside because you get wet anyway. And there's so much work while we were walking.

But my parents always said that one of the ways that we can break poverty is studying, and we can't tell them no, so we have to go if we want to or not. And so my mom one day she came over with a notebook and a pencil. And she said, guys, you have to go to school, you have to study, you have to learn something. So you can leave this place, and she cut the notebook in three pieces and the pencil in three pieces, and she gave one to my oldest brother, one for me, and one for my youngest brother. By that time, we were very mad because who wants to go to school with a cut notebook, right? But at that time was what we can do. Also, she prepared one meal for a whole day and then left to work, and she used to say, so, you can eat it at the time you want, but remember, just

one. So we decided to eat it during the night because I think one of the worst feelings in life is going to bed with an empty stomach because it makes a lot of sounds and you feel like you cannot concentrate to sleep.

Aaron: That's incredible. So you're living with your two brothers. You have to walk two hours to school every day. You don't have shoes, so you wear plastic bags over your feet, and you get one meal a day, and you have to decide when you're going to eat it. And that's just, I don't think that most of us can even fathom those types of circumstances. So tell us a little bit about how did and when did Compassion come into your life? Like, how old were you and just what were the circumstances that brought you into relationship with Compassion?

Nujerling: So in the village, there were a lot of Christian people coming over in to preach. But by that time, people were not paying attention because who's going to pay attention to somebody love people, when they are hungry? So I think Compassion used a very good way to get close to the community. So one day they came over telling us, like, you know, there is a special organization, named Compassion International that is Christian, but they also provide food for kids. And also school supplies, and then going to learn something in Compassion. But the only condition is they have to go three times a week and then one week on Sunday to church.

Everybody, of course, said yes because they were covering a necessity that the village have. So next week, we of all the kids from the community were going to Compassion center. We were very excited. All those kids with no shoes, dirty clothes, but we were happy that they said they would serve us food. So they get started praying. We were like, okay, what's the next time? When is the moment the food will come over? They talk about the Bible classes and then around 2 p.m. The food arrives and there was a bunch of rice. And especially in my case, I haven't meat before. And I was like, wow, this is a real chicken meat. This is awesome. So we have this special time.

And also I can remember that day, I also received my first gift that I have ever had before. It was a Bible. It was a small one they had for girls a white one and for boys, they had a blue one. So I received one that had my name on it. And I can say it was a wonderful day because I received something that was something mine on my own that I don't have to cut or split with somebody else. Also Compassion provides us not just food. They try to teach us something to survive after a Compassion program like beauty salon classes, cooking classes, computer classes and also English. And it's something funny that I always say that all the English I learned was from Compassion. And I know it should be better, but Compassion just do a wonderful job. Also to our community, they provide the first sanitary system with the community and the government. They give some money and they build a lot of letrinas for every house. And also they make it so

they can receive clean water in the community. And also they help to repair roofs of the houses so when it rains, the water don't get inside.

Aaron: Wow. So how old were you when you started being sponsored?

Nujerling: I was eight or nine years old.

Aaron: Eight or nine. And your first sponsor, if I understand this correctly, was a 15-year-old girl. And she sponsored you initially. And then obviously the couple that we saw in the video, they took you and they've been sponsoring you. Now you're pretty much part of the family.

Nujerling: Yeah, my first sponsor, she was Jennifer Taylor. She was a college student. And she started sponsoring me when she was was 15. And she always sent letters. And there's something very funny in this story that one day I received a letter. And most of the time our parents don't have time to tell us they care for us and that they love us because I think they do in their way by working and providing food. And the first time I saw the letter, "love that I love you and I care for you." It was a time by Jennifer. And I told to my friends in school, you know, I have a gringo uncle that sent me a letter. Can you believe that? And then she said, you know, she loved me. And it's a white person. That's something important to say. Because we call gringo in Dominican today, right, Americans.

And I remember also to see the first Bible verse, "Delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."

Aaron: Yeah, I love that passage, that verse. And you had that written to you by a sponsor. And, Nujerling, what were the desires of your heart? As a little girl, you finally got a full belly. And you've got some opportunities you've never had before. What were the desires that you had within you?

Nujerling: So, compassion has a program and they call my way to the future. And every year we have to write our plans for future. When I start my first year to complete, I say, like, I don't have any dream. Well, I want to be a doctor, but I know that we're not possible because we don't have the resources to do that. So, next time and next year they put me again to grow my plans for future. And I say, like, yeah, I want to be a doctor, but I know that's not something that my parents and I can't afford. But then the third year they asked me again. And I remember professors from Compassion, Pastor from Church, they said, if you believe in the Lord and if you work for His Kingdom, He will provide you all the things you need to achieve the dreams you have. So, this year I wrote, "I'm going to be a doctor". So, it changed my life very dramatically because we have to continue this. So, I finished high school, but then Compassion has a special program

called LDP program. They have a love leadership program. But this is just for outstanding kids, very smart, and people from community with leadership. I went to the interview, but I said, like, when I saw all those young people, so smart, so full of dreams, I said, like, well, I don't think I would be able to get this scholarship. So, I took the interview where I left, and the next day I went to a public university and I signed it to become a professor.

I don't have nothing bad to say about a professor, but I don't want to be a professor. So, every day I went to school crying because I don't want to be doing that. So, six months later, I received a call from Compassion office saying, Nujerling, you have been selected to receive a full scholarship to study in a private university, a school of medicine. So, I was like, I stand up from the classroom and I say, hey, everybody, I'm leaving to become a doctor. So, by that time, now I remember that I shouldn't say that at that time. And I went to school, I graduated in six years, how it's planned. I graduated Summa Cum Laude and I finished it. And one of the classes we always hear that females cannot become a neurosurgeon. And before, now things are changing, of course. And they said I was very challenging and those stuff. So, I said to myself, I wanted to do neurosurgery. So, I have the grades to apply for the position. I went to the interview with the professor of neurosurgery and they said, Nujerling, you're nice, your record is good, you have the grades. But we cannot offer you neurosurgery because we are not offering for females at this time. And they told me we can talk with other professors, we can send you to plastic surgery or we can send you to dermatology. You will be perfect in that area. And I was like, well, honestly, I considered the position because I wanted to do something. But then I called my sponsors, Sarah. And I said, well, you know, they offered me plastic surgery and dermatology, I can do any of those. And she said, I don't think you should do that, you should do what you want to do. So, she told me, let's see if you can do it in another country. So, I applied to Brazil and I went there and I took the test. And I think two months later, I received a call and an email saying that I was selected to do the program there with four guys that were in my college.

I finished in the time I was supposed to finish and I graduated with honors, I gave the speech of the graduation. And after that, I wanted to do another stuff and Sarah, she was there and she asked me, so what's next? And I said, well, there is a special program named School-based Surgery for very complex surgery in neurosurgery. And the program is in Tokyo in Japan. So, there's a bunch of people applying for this position. But let's see. So, she said, yes, let's see what the Lord had for us.

So, I applied for that position. A few months later, I received the email, you have been selected to do a School-based Surgery program. And I was the first female Latino-American in the hospital doing this special program. I lived there two years and I'm back to the Dominican Republic. Just saying that this is not about me because there's so

many outstanding Compassion students everywhere doing amazing things. It means that God can do miracle things through Compassion.

Aaron: Oh, man, I love that so much. Thank you. What an incredible story. Like, you're a neurosurgeon. Some days do you just wake up like, that blows my mind. You're a neurosurgeon. We've had a lot of distinguished people on this platform. I don't know that we've ever had a neurosurgeon. I don't know that I have any friends that are neurosurgeons. You're my first friend that's a neurosurgeon. I'm not nearly smart enough to even be talking to you right now. That's just really quite frightening.

So I know that you've had all these desires in your heart. You're a dreamer. God's fulfilled so many of those dreams. What are you dreaming about nowadays?

Nujerling: Well, now I'm working in the Dominican Republic. In the second in the highest hospital of complex neurosurgery. So we are doing a lot of surgeries for people in need that cannot afford. You know, neurosurgery is a very expensive specialty. And we are also doing surgeries for free to kids. So I have done surgery on Compassion kids and also doing surgeries on Compassion parents' kids also. And we are dreaming to do a huge hospital in the country that can also serve kids from Haiti and kids from the Dominican Republic.

Aaron: That's amazing. That's incredible. I love it. And I know she doesn't want to brag on herself, but she's currently sponsoring 15 Compassion children herself. And so I just think that's incredible. Yeah. Nujerling, like before we pray over you, before you go, like just what would you want to say to us as a church? How would you encourage us today?

Nujerling: So I can say that sponsoring a child is giving them hope, future, and the chance to dream. I think when you are in poverty and in hunger, you don't have time to think about dreams or the future or hope. But when you have those areas covered, you have the chance to feel hope and you can dream. So if you are sponsoring a child, you are giving him or her hope future and ability to dream.

Aaron: I couldn't agree more. Thank you so much. Thank you. And what I'd love to do is, before she leaves, I just want to pray over Nujerling and just ask that God would just continue to bless the tremendous work that she's doing in the Dominican Republic. So let's pray as a church family.

Father, we just come to you right now and I thank you so much for Nujerling, who she is, the work and the testimony that you have been doing, are doing, and will do through her life. She's such an encouragement. I can see the light of Jesus all over her. And God, I just ask that you would bless her for taking time out of her busy schedule, getting on an airplane, having a long day of travel to get to us. I know that it's been exhausting.



God, I just pray that you would fill her cup. I ask that as she leaves, that she would feel encouraged, that she would be inspired, that she would be blessed, that she would know that she has one more church family in the States that loves her and is with her. And so God, thank you for being the kind of God you are. Only you can write a story like that to take somebody that's in such need and to provide hope through people that I'm sure felt like they were inadequate. And yet you took what they had and you magnified it, multiplied it in tremendous ways to bring her to the position that she's at now, to where she can make such a difference in the lives of people through the surgeries that she is performing. God, I just pray today that you would speak, that you do it again, that maybe there are other little boys and little girls in Peru that are just like Nujerling and they've got desires, but they don't even know they have desires because they're so hungry. Where they had needs that need to be met first.

And God, I pray that we would not only declare the gospel message, but that we would demonstrate it through our generosity, through our support and encouragement and prayers. God, would you please do it again? And would you please open up our hearts to whatever it is that you desire to say to us today?

We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said, amen.

Hey, can we just express our appreciation one more time?