

Malawi Reflection

By Laura Riley

After two weeks in Malawi, Africa I was mentally exhausted. The questions were building up in my brain and I had no answers. We had spent the past two weeks playing with poor, malnourished children who were some of the most joyful children I had ever met. We had spent three days at an orphanage cleaning and spending time with children orphaned by AIDS and other diseases. They were some of the most loving children I had ever met. I was immediately at a loss for the pity that I thought I should feel but didn't for the children of Malawi. I loved them at first sight, could see myself in them and envied their seemingly simple existence. But by the second week I was ashamed to ever have compared myself to them. After watching a family's crops wash away in an unprecedented flood of the Shire river in Southern Malawi, my previous admiration of their simplicity washed away as well and the stark reality of life without safety nets settled in. Those families would be plagued by famine for the following year, some may die simply of starvation. How could I dare compare their life to my own? I routinely consume over the amount of calories my body needs to survive. I spend money on entertainment and frivolity. I spend more money on my pet cat than these people earn in a year. Though I'm still learning to work through the shame I felt, a powerful lesson I gained is how to separate wants from needs in my life. I now strive to live with that simplicity that I envied in Malawi. I am cutting out the wants of my life and replacing them with time spent serving others. I feel since returning I have a clearer reason to live; I am alive to serve God and others and if I focus on that, everything else will follow.