

It's the third day that Rita is in labour. I rush her from the hospital to another specialised 'mother and child' unit. N'Djamena traffic is at its worst at 7.30am so we crawl along, but still every bump in the road produces a gasp of pain from the exhausted mother-to-be lying on the back seat.

At the next hospital we rush to get an ultra sound. In that tiny room Rita's dark eyes lock with mine, they are heavy with panic as the technician says slowly 'I... can't hear a heartbeat' in that moment it's as if our own hearts have stopped. Rita has had an arduous pregnancy and endured harsh medicines to treat HIV and other STDs so as to protect her child. I shoot up a silent, desperate prayer and then... 'no, hold on...' the slow but rhythmic beeping of the baby's heart rings out and we all let out deep sighs of relief and thankfulness. The baby is alive, she is in distress and needs to be delivered by C Section immediately, but she is alive!

By God's grace baby 'Nao' is born, weighing around 6lbs. However, Rita is distant, vacant and refuses to hold her daughter. This is no 'normal' post-natal depression. Long before the baby was born Rita made clear that she intended to give her to her estranged mother in the south of the country. As the baby's father has had no contact with Rita since discovering in an ultrasound that the baby was a girl it is a mercy that the grandmother is willing to take her.

Many women we work with have complicated deliveries which relate to their own life traumas. Rita ran away from home at 13yrs of age, hopeful of marrying a man that seemed to love her. She fell pregnant, lost the child and then lost one boyfriend after another. As the women here have told me 'Without a husband I have no value.' So, with each broken relationship Rita's hope of finding value and respect in this society melted coldly away. Shame, despair and disappointment were all part of the journey that lead her into prostitution and urged her to detach emotionally in order to 'survive.'

Rita is despised by her society and many consider her to be unworthy of love, care and even the gospel. I look at Rita, her head is bowed as she risks a glance at her beautiful daughter and I can't help but reflect...that could have been *me*. If I had experienced her heartache and endured ill treatment in this society it is probable that I would have fallen into a similar trap in order to survive and be 'independent' from those who hurt me. I am reminded of Jesus's grace in John 8 and the stark lesson – none of us have the right to condemn her!

Often, when I visit Rita her request is the same: 'will you share a Bible story with me?' She is quick to tell me her favourites: an estranged child who is welcomed home (the prodigal son and Jacob and Laban), a despised and bereft woman who has her dignity restored (Ruth) and a prostitute who is forgiven and honoured (Rahab). Rita now knows these stories by heart. She once asked me 'please pray that I have the

courage to turn to God and do what I know I need to' and so I dare to ask you to pray the same prayer for her. Without God's help it is surely too hard for Rita to offer her shattered heart for healing or to dare to hope for a better future. Yet healing *is* possible and it is God's desire to give her life, hope and a future...

In the Vulnerable Women's ministry our vision is to see broken and lost women find hope, healing and salvation through Jesus. We long to see women's dignity restored and for them to find sustainable employment to support themselves and their children.

After 6yrs of working closely with the women we are finally at the point of being able to open a small Rehabilitation Centre. The Centre will invest in women who are ready and willing to change. The Bible based syllabus will provide spiritual, emotional and practical support for the women. We will offer work placements and training in life skills to help them find new employment and prayer and counselling to help them find healing.

At the moment we urgently need staff for the centre! There are many potential candidates for the course but only two full time staff. We need people with a heart for the lost and hurting who have experience in any of the following areas: creative arts, Counselling, teaching, outreach, businesss and much more. If you think you could contribute in any way to this vital work on a short term or long term basis please contact us. Women like Rita long for your encouragement and help.