

From Bottom to Top

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This is the story of two brothers who grew up in a family with six boys. Let's call these two Blama and Forfee. That's not their real names, but their story is real. As children, Blama and Forfee lived in a city in West Africa that is full of people—young people and older people, people always moving about the streets, shopping at the market, and making noise—lots of noise: honking car horns, noisy trucks and busses, shouting people, and all kinds of animals making noises. Their city is always busy and there seems to be no night; people are out at all hours.

Growing up in such a neighborhood was a challenge for Blama and Forfee. Most people there do not think it is wrong to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes or use drugs of whatever kind. In fact, it was normal in their city for people to do these things that Christians consider unacceptable. In their city, even children as young as six years old want to be special boyfriends and girlfriends—at ages far too young for children to be thinking about that.

Blama's and Forfee's parents were very simple people. They did not have a very good place to live, a car, nice clothes or shoes. Sometimes their parents had enough money to buy some better things, but they were among the very poor of their city. They were at the bottom of society.

One thing they did have—that was Jesus. A Christian lady from the Caribbean moved into their neighborhood when the boys were very young. She cared about the children in the neighborhood and she was especially fond of Blama and Forfee. She helped the children to

learn to sing and to give concerts in front of crowds of people. Most of all she told them about Jesus and taught them to love God.

Across the street from where Blama and Forfee lived was a Seventh-day Adventist church. Every Sabbath, a woman from the church would visit in the neighborhood, stopping by the homes and asking if the parents would let the children go to Sabbath School with her. Blama's and Forfee's parents didn't hesitate to allow both boys to go to church with her. The parents were happy to send their children when there was vacation Bible school, church picnics and church socials.

At church, Blama and Forfee learned to follow Jesus and to stand strong for truth. Whenever they were quizzed by people about why they didn't do the common things that others were doing, they would say, "It's just not right." As sometimes happens when children refuse to do things that are not right for Christians to do, Blama and Forfee were called names like "gbeleh" ("foolish person") or "tamlan" ("behaving like a little child"). Sometimes other young people called them "reverent" or "holy" because they went to church.

When Blama was 13 and Forfee was 14, both boys gave their lives completely to Jesus. They were baptized and became members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The challenges they faced became even worse. Now their friends ridiculed them and members of their family who did not accept their new found faith persecuted them. Their former friends made fun of them publicly and tried to make them angry.

They slapped Blama and Forfee in the face and said things like, "If you're truly following Jesus, you'll let us slap your other cheek."

But through it all Blama and Forfee did not give in. They held on to their newfound faith and kept trusting and serving the Lord. Though their parents did not attend church, they nevertheless did what they could to help the boys go to school. Eventually, both graduated from high school and entered university. One studied engineering and the other economics.

Then, a great civil war came to their country. Many people died in the violence. But Blama

and Forfee lived. They are sure God miraculously spared their lives. They both decided to change their careers and to work for God in a special way.

Today, Blama and Forfee are gospel ministers. One is a pastor in a church in their home country and the other is a pastor in another country. They both have received good education. When they tell their story to boys and girls, they tell how God has helped them from the bottom to the top. God will help us too, whatever our circumstances, whatever ridicule or persecution or trouble we may face to be faithful to Him like Blama and Forfee. To God be the glory.