

Life of Service in Our Golden Years

The Cookstove Project

By Mark Johnson



“Even if you are on the right track you'll get run over if you just sit there.”

- Will Rogers

As we ease into our “Golden Years,” a whole new world has opened up, which I believe to be true for each of us. It is an exciting time, minus the physical challenges that come with aging. But perhaps the silver lining of aging is that these golden years will lead us into the second half of life where we can distill and apply the essence of what we have learned in our younger years. So, during our golden years, what are we to do? We have been given so much from God, so how do we share these blessings with others. Beyond what is most central to us — our families —there may be other activities where we can use our God-given talents and gifts. I became very excited when Father proclaimed that the age of the church was over and that it was now time for us to take ownership of God’s providence. He would often say that he taught us everything and encouraged us to take more responsibility. I felt liberated to begin to trust God directly and, for me, that meant getting involved in my local community activities and working internationally. It was at that time that I learned about the **Cookstove Project**. Getting involved in this international project has dramatically changed my life and, through this, I have come to understand and relate with God most profoundly.

I learned about this important project through Rebecca Sommer. What Rebecca learned at a convention put on by The Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, was that nearly half the world cooks over an open three-stone fire. These campfire-style stoves are located inside homes, so you can imagine the amount of smoke that is breathed in each day. This method of cooking leads to numerous health issues, especially lung, eye and heart problems. Also there are numerous accounts of young children getting seriously burned from this open-fire cooking. Even more shocking, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) is that 3.8 million people, mostly women and children, were dying each year from the simple act of cooking meals for their families. In addition, there is also serious environmental impact that comes from the black carbon emissions in the smoke released into the air, as well as the enormous amount of wood that is harvested for fuel, leading to the ongoing forest degradation around the world.



Three Stone method of cooking

To begin to deal with these serious issues, the Cookstove Project was established in 2013 in two countries, in rural areas of Uganda and Nepal. In both countries we knew reliable folks that would become our project managers, folks who have helped build a team of workers who have assisted in constructing these stoves.



Clean Cookstove in Uganda



Clean Cookstove in Nepal

These rural villages where we work are without electricity, running water, or indoor bathrooms. Due to very limited incomes in these countries, we decided early on not to charge families for a new clean cookstove. In both countries we have used free local materials that were available to build these stoves, a method that was already being used in both countries. We do require each family to help in preparing the materials and then help in building their stove, which enables them to feel ownership of their new stove. In Uganda the cost to build a clean cookstove is only \$10 and in Nepal, a bit more. Almost 98% of our funds raised goes to pay for our employees in both countries. All of our 8, very engaged board members here in the states are volunteers. Over the past 10 years, over 27,000 families have received a new clean cookstove, dramatically changing their lives for the better.



Children helping children

Having visited our project in Uganda, I found there is a lot to learn from these families, who have very little, but who are very grateful for the simplest changes in their lives. The children, despite a very humble life, have big hearts and the brightest smiles. I have been humbled by their attitude toward life, and how these families work together as one larger family in their villages. Over these past 10 years I have seen and experienced endless miracles related to this project. I have learned that when we live as Father always taught — “to live for the sake of others” — that God becomes your constant partner and the blessing of our effort flows freely. The “co-creator with God” philosophy that we have learned in Divine Principle, becomes so real. For the sake of the world and for your own spiritual health and growth, I would encourage everyone to find a way to serve in some capacity. I promise it will make your Golden Years all that much more special and help make this One Family Under God idea truly come to life.



Our last day in Uganda

I would like to end with a few words from Dr. Julie Glazer, a friend who recently visited the Cookstove Project in rural Uganda. Following that, I have included a link to our website, where more information and videos of the work being done are available.

“We saw how the people cooked on three-stone fires in the homes. We saw smoke and black soot that lined the walls. Mothers stand over these stoves for six hours a

day. It is no wonder that they are dying. Children are suffering because they are living in that environment.

And when you look at that in the context of \$10 to build a cookstove, it is very easy to get excited. The stoves are truly life changing. They are so proud of their new cookstove. Their gratitude is unbelievable.”

Please visit our website for more details and watch the professional videos of the work being done.

<https://cookstoveproject.org>