

Impossible Dreams A Hole in Our World

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch

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This morning we continue with our series of messages entitled Impossible Dreams. God calls us to lives of significance. He invites us to join with him in making a difference in the world. He wants us to join with him to meet the needs of his children who are suffering. I hope you are reading The Hole in Our Gospel each week. This morning we will consider the content in part three, chapters 8 through 14. Rich Stearns graphically reveals a hole in our world. He puts faces on the day to day struggle of people to survive. God has always had a plan to deal with the injustice and suffering in the world. We are the plan. The apostle Paul reminds of how one part of the plan works.

2 Cor. 8:13-15

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, ¹⁵as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

One hundred jet liners crashed this morning killing 26,500 people. Can you imagine the world attention that would be focused on such a catastrophe? The media would be saturated with stories for days. How did it happen? What could be done to prevent it from ever happening again? What if it happened again tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that—and continued happening every day? There would be a tremendous outcry until a solution was found.

Rich Stearns uses that scenario to bring home a reality that we ignore every day. 26,500 children died yesterday due to poverty-related problems like starvation and disease. Another 26,500 will die today. Another 26,500 will die tomorrow and the day after that. One child every 5 seconds will die. Ten million every year. And yet we don't hear about the problem. Why? Because it is not my kid. It is someone else's kid who lives thousands of miles away.

Yet every one of those kids is God's child, and he cares about each one. God loves all his children. Imagine a parent who has two sons. One is a golden boy. Everything comes easy for him. He excels in sports and academics. He is popular with the girls—he never has trouble getting a date in high school. He breezes through college on a full scholarship. He graduates and lands a high paying job. He is living his dream

For the other son, everything is a challenge. No matter how hard he tries, he does not excel at anything. He is not athletic. He is not very bright. He flunks out of high school and takes a job for minimum wage. He came into the world with some physical and mental challenges. No matter how hard he tries, he experiences one dead end after another.

The parent loves them both—equally. But he has to admit, that his heart goes out to the son who struggles so hard and gets no where. This son has obstacles in his life over which he has no control. The same is true for God as our heavenly Father. He loves us all equally—the fortunate and the not so fortunate. But his heart really goes out to those who no matter how hard they try experience one dead end after another. His heart goes out to the mother who is watching her son die of starvation today. His heart goes out to the father who is holding his daughter as she dies from malaria. "God, help me to see the world as you see it." This is our Father's world and he cares for all his children. When one of them dies, it may not be our child, but it is our brother or sister in Christ. Do we care about the things that matter to God? If we love God, we care about the things that matter to him.

Rich identifies some of the barriers we have to overcome in order to see the poor as God sees them. One barrier is that the problem is so overwhelming. The magnitude is so vast. We are bombarded by the media with massive catastrophes in our world everyday: famines, droughts, hurricanes, mudslides, wild fires, starvation, terrorist attacks. We see so much suffering; we get numb to it. We turn the channel or the page in the newspaper, and it is gone. How do we overcome our numbness? Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision,

wrestled with this. He struggled to sustain a level of broken heartedness and caring year after year. He cried out to God, "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God." He knew that praying that prayer every day was the only way he could love somebody else's kid the way God did. We need to pray constantly that God will soften our hearts toward those who are suffering. Our hearts can get so hard and indifferent that we quit caring. We need for God to replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh.

Rich points out that the prophet Ezekiel identified the most flagrant sin of Sodom. It was not sexual immorality, but rather indifference to the poor:

Ezekiel 16:49

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy."

When we pray to see the world as God sees it, we will not only see how God sees the poor; we will also see how God sees those of us who are indifferent to the needs of his children. How it must break his heart when he sees how much he has given us and how unwilling we are to share. How it must break his heart when we do not even care—when we are totally indifferent to the fact that one of his children is dying every five seconds when we could do something to stop it.

When we talk about statistics and masses of people, it is easier for us to ignore the problem. When we hear the name of one of those children or see the face of one of them, it is much more difficult to ignore. Right here in Lubbock we have children who suffer. Duke and Karla Underwood started an after-school ministry called the R.O.K. which stands for "Reaching Our Kids." Our church supports this ministry through our mission fund. Many of you volunteer your time as a part of this ministry. Let's go to the ROK via video and put a face to some of God's children.

VIDEO: R.O.K.

Each of God's children has a name and a face. In order to remember those faces, we need to pray every day: "God, break my heart with the things that break your heart."

Indifference is one of the greatest barriers to eliminating the tremendous suffering in our world.

Another barrier we have to overcome in order to see the poor as God sees them is our judgmental attitude toward the poor. Many people have the false belief that poor persons in America are that way because they don't work hard enough; they continually make bad choices; they are lazy or stupid. Some persons believe that if you are poor, it is because you deserve it. One Wednesday morning our staff was taking a break in the office conference room. On Wednesday mornings our Good Samaritan ministry gives out food vouchers to those who cannot afford food. One family drove by in a late model Lincoln Continental on their way to get a food voucher. It caused quite a discussion among the staff. There was some anger expressed at those who took advantage of the system taking resources away from persons with legitimate needs. Others commented on how this family did not know how to prioritize things. Why would they make payments on a fancy car when they could not afford to buy food? Of course, none of us knew the reality of the situation. We were all forming judgments on what we saw. Perhaps the car had been given to them by a relative. Perhaps the head of the house had just lost his job and the car was going to be repossessed the next day. This was the last day they could get out and get food. We form judgments about the poor because of our prejudices and pre-conceived ideas. As long as we do not sit down with them and listen to their stories, then we can continue to live with our judgmental attitudes. As long as we do not see them as God sees them, we can dismiss them.

The reality is there are some persons who have a welfare mentality. They are the chronic poor who have learned how to work the system, and they do not desire to change.

Let's be honest, there are those persons out there. But the vast majority of the poor are trapped because they have no other options. Frequently it is because they have lost jobs or cannot find one. They may struggle with physical or mental problems that leave them with few options. It is not that the poor are lazier, less intelligent, or unwilling to make efforts to change their condition. They are trapped by circumstances beyond their power to change.

Our very first foreign mission team went to Haiti in 1988. I was fortunate enough to go with this team. This experience opened my eyes to the reality that some people are trapped by poverty through no fault of their own. The unemployment rate in Haiti is 80 percent. Don't tell the poor in Haiti to get a job. There are no jobs available. Several families share a one room house in Haiti. There may be 20 to 30 people living in a "house" that is 12 feet by 12 feet. They have to sleep in shifts because there is only space for 5 or 6 of them to sleep on the dirt floor. The rest of the persons roam the streets looking for scraps of food or a ripening mango on a tree. Children are abandoned on the streets because the parents cannot bear to watch them literally starve to death. They hope that workers from an orphanage will find them and give them food and shelter. The vast majority of the poor in our world are trapped by circumstances they cannot change. If we are to see the poor as God sees them, we have to first repent of our judgmental attitudes and feelings.

Our indifference and our judgmental attitudes are tremendous barriers that must be overcome if we are to be used by God to make a difference in our world. What would happen if we prayed every day these two prayers:

- "Open my eyes, God, to see the world as you see it."
- "Break my heart, O God, with the things that break your heart."

It is not our fault that people are suffering, but it is our responsibility to do something about it. As Paul said to the Corinthians: "your plenty will supply what they need." Why has God blessed us with so much? Because he wants us to join with him in meeting the needs

of our brothers and sisters who are struggling. Paul goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 9:9, “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor.” Where has he scattered those gifts? To you and me. He never intended for us to hoard those gifts. He intended for us to experience the joy of using those gifts to help others.

Now, I’m not saying that this means that we should give away everything we have. God wants us to enjoy our blessings, but he also wants us to share our blessings. Margaret and I love to travel. We enjoy horses. I don’t think God is calling us to give up those things, but he is calling us to give some of our blessings and time to help others in need. And, not just once a year, but throughout the year.

I want to challenge each of us to do something to make a difference for those who are struggling with hunger, impure water, disease and poverty housing. Pray that God will put on your heart one thing you can do to make a difference in the next 90 days. On October 11 we will distribute a list of opportunities. Some of them will be simple things. Some of them will be bold things. To prepare your heart, come up to the church and pray at noon one day this week. Participate in the prayer vigil this Saturday. Begin to earnestly ask God to what he wants you to do. As I was praying that prayer, God put on my heart to participate this week in Our Family Promise ministry to homeless families with children. That is where I will be Tuesday evening.

I got a call from the conference missions coordinator. He told me that a missionary we support in the Congo will be coming to Lubbock in November. He asked if we would like to have him speak in church. I said we would be glad to. Then he said, “Some of us are going to the Congo for two weeks in April to help train pastors. Would you like to go with us?” The State Department lists Congo on their travel alerts as an unsafe place. I said: “I will have to pray about that.” I did. God said: “You asked me what you could do. I sent you an invitation to go to the Congo. Well?” “OK, God, then you will have to make me brave!” When

we start to pray things will happen. God will put something on our heart. Or he will open a door or send an invitation. He is ready for us to join with him in changing the world. We can't do everything, but we can do something. We are asking you to do one thing just to get started and see what happens. Are you willing to pray and ask God what he wants you to do? Buckle your seatbelt - you will be in for an adventure!