

WEEK FOUR



Beatrice (right), an entrepreneur and role model in her Zambian community.

Jon Warren/World Vision 2003

Week 4:

BASED ON

THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL: THE HOLE IN THE WORLD



FACT

In 1820 the gap between the richest and poorest countries was about four to one. In 1913, it was 11 to one, and in 1950 it was 35 to one. By 2002 ... the gap was 75 to one. (*The Hole in Our Gospel*, p. 122)



SCRIPTURE | 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

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This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!



PAYING IT FORWARD

Excerpt from The Hole in Our Gospel by Rich Stearns

A few years ago, on a trip to Zambia, I was introduced to a man named Rodrick who was about thirty. Rodrick's story was heartbreaking. After serving in the Zambian military, he hoped to return home to his wife, Beatrice, but was instead falsely accused of plotting against the government and thrown into prison. Beatrice gave birth to their son, John, while Rodrick was imprisoned. After several years Rodrick was cleared and released, only to come home to a wife and child living in poverty. The next few years were grim as they had more children and struggled to support them. They tragically lost one child to cerebral malaria. Meanwhile, they literally had nothing—no income, no food, no health care, and no opportunities.

But Rodrick and Beatrice were hardworking and clever. The one possession they had was a small hair dryer, so they started a haircutting business to earn a few dollars. World Vision staff, impressed by their initiative, looked past Beatrice and Rodrick's poverty and saw instead their assets. They were industrious and entrepreneurial, willing to work hard. So instead of giving them food and other *things*, World Vision gave them a small loan for an idea they had. Their idea? They would buy bolts of cloth and tie-dye them in hopes of selling the cloth to women who made their families' clothing. I have to admit I was skeptical. How in the world would this couple ever sell enough cloth to make a living? I had spent a career in consumer product marketing and knew a bad idea when I saw one. This idea seemed like a loser to me in a place where there seemed to be no market at all for tie-dyed cloth. Even after they presented me with a beautiful bolt of fabric to take home to my wife, I only felt pity for them, knowing their business would likely fail.

In 2008 I returned to Zambia and had an opportunity to see Rodrick and Beatrice again. It had been four years since they started their little enterprise. I was stunned. Their tie-dye business has succeeded. With the money they saved, they paid back their loan and then started a small storefront to sell food, diapers, and other sundries. One store had turned into two, and they hired their first employee. Rodrick then was able to get connected to the electric grid, and he started a welding business. Once on the grid, Rodrick began charging car batteries overnight for a fee. (These batteries are often used for home electricity by people who can't afford to be on the grid.) Next door he built a Cel-Tel station, where those with cell phones can buy their minutes. He then built a long building out of scrap lumber and tin; filled it with benches; bought a TV, DVD player, and a satellite dish; and opened the first movie theater in his community. Not only did he show movies, but he also received all of the professional soccer matches, which the men of the community gladly paid to see. When I visited, he was showing—I kid you not—*The JESUS Film* in the middle of the day to about 10 customers.

During my visit, Rodrick took me to a concrete slab with a roof over it that he had just built. The

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next week, he said, a pool table would arrive, and the first community pool hall would open—a good thing, he explained, because it helped keep the younger men occupied and out of trouble. The young men in his community looked up to Rodrick.

In all, Rodrick and Beatrice, a couple I had pitied just four years earlier, now had 11 different businesses! When I first met them, I had seen only their deficits, not their assets—a mistake I will never make again.

I wanted to test Rodrick’s values, so I asked him a question. “Rodrick,” I said, “you are now a rich man. What are you going to do with all of your newfound wealth?” Rodrick thought for a moment, and then told me that he had been teaching a Sunday school class at his church for many of the orphans in his community. There are 41 in his class, and he has committed to visiting each one at his or her home twice a month. Then he said, “God has been good to us, and with His continued blessings I hope to build a school for the orphans. Pray that He will allow me to do this.” Rodrick was paying it forward. He rather reminded me of Jimmy Stewart in the classic Christmas movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*. His solid

example and caring spirit were changing the lives of others. In fact, the whole community seemed more alive than it had four years before. With Rodrick and Beatrice as role models, others had begun to believe that it was possible to succeed, and they were following their leaders’ example. One couple’s lives and faith were lifting and inspiring an entire community—unleashing the potential that had been there all along. (pp. 128-130)



MEDITATIONS

“We can be the generation that no longer accepts that an accident of latitude determines whether a child lives or dies—but *will* we be that generation? Will we in the West realize our potential or will we sleep in the comfort of our affluence with apathy and indifference murmuring softly in our ears? Fifteen thousand people dying needlessly every day from AIDS, TB, and malaria. Mothers, fathers, teachers, farmers, nurses, mechanics, children. This is Africa’s crisis. That it’s not on the nightly news, that we do not treat this as an emergency—that’s *our* crisis ... History will be our judge, but what’s written is up to us. We can’t say our generation didn’t know how to do it. We can’t say our generation couldn’t afford it. And we can’t say our generation didn’t have reason to do it. It’s up to us.”

—Bono (pp. 105)

“Sometimes I would like to ask God why He allows poverty, suffering and injustice when He could do something about it.”

“Well, why don’t you ask Him?”

“Because I’m afraid He would ask me the same question.”

—Anonymous (p. 161)

“Don’t fail to do something just because you can’t do everything.”

—Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision (p. 152)

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After reading the passage from 2 Corinthians, what do you think God's solution is for dealing with disparity? What does "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor" mean in today's context? In what practical ways does this instill in you a sense of responsibility as a steward of God's gifts?
2. According to 2 Corinthians, what is the result of this generosity of Christians toward the poor?
3. Make a list of common stereotypes of the poor. Where did these stereotypes come from? Which ones do you share? How can Rodrick's story be used to counter some of these myths?
4. Why is it important to give people opportunities rather than just things? How different would your life look if you had not been given access to opportunities such as free public school, adequate nutrition, clean water, access to health care, and a safe place to live?
5. How would your attitude change if you approached the poor with a desire to affirm and unleash rather than with just a quick fix?
6. Rich states, "almost all poverty is fundamentally the result of a lack of options"(p.118) Do you agree with this statement? If this is the case, what are some tangible ways to help create more options?
7. Do you believe that our generation has the ability to wipe out poverty? Why or why not? Do you believe it is our responsibility? Why or why not?
8. What are you currently doing to be a part of alleviating poverty? What is your church doing? What more can you do?
9. The anonymous quote offers a question that many believers and non-believers alike ask when they hear about all the suffering in the world: "God, why don't you do something?" What if that question were asked of you? What would your response be?
10. Bob Pierce's simple statement carries a very poignant message to many who are paralyzed because there is too much to be done. Describe a time when you have done something even in the midst of an overwhelming situation.



TAKE ACTION

Think about all the opportunities and privileges you have had over your lifetime: education, clean water, health care, job opportunities, good nutrition, vaccinations, sanitation facilities, and so forth. Write down all these opportunities/privileges on a piece of paper. Try to imagine your life without these. How different would your life look?

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CHALLENGE

Now that you have recognized the opportunities you have been given, explore ways that you can pay it forward. Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. On one side, write “Opportunities,” and on the other side, write, “Paying It Forward.” On the opportunities side, write the things you listed earlier. The “Paying It Forward” side should relate to opportunities. For example, if you write “access to clean water,” then the “Paying It Forward” column might be something like “contribute toward building a deep well in a developing country” or “give up buying soda, coffee and other drinks and donate the money toward water and sanitation projects in the developing world.” The list of ways to pay it forward is endless. Ask others about their ideas and perform some action as a community, or just come up with your own creative ideas. This is not about giving a hand-out to someone, but about giving others the same opportunities you have been given.



SCRIPTURE FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Leviticus 23:22
- Amos 5:11–12, 21–24
- Isaiah 10:1–2
- Jeremiah 22:16
- Proverbs 19:17
- John 16:33



PRAYER

Pray for a renewed spirit of generosity. Pray for the courage to be good stewards of God’s money. Tell God your fears about money and ask Him to remind you that He is bigger than your fears. Thank God for all that you have and trust Him to be your strength and your guide. Pray for a renewed sense of responsibility to care for the broken and the weak. Repent for the times you failed to care and failed to respond. Ask God for a spirit of learning as you seek to recognize, encourage, and support the talents and potential in others. Pray for a humble heart so that you may sow generously without the need for recognition.