



2: The Hole in Our World | Pastor Joe Wittwer | October 25, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

When one person dies, it's a tragedy; when a million people die, it's a statistic. It's easy to see statistics like these and just be numbed. But God doesn't see statistics. He sees individual people, and it breaks His heart. As we look at the hole in our world, this is our prayer: "Lord, the hole in our world is so huge, the need so overwhelming, that it's easy to become numb or paralyzed and do nothing. But let our hearts be broken and motivate us to action. Amen." [Read **Luke 10:25-37** together.] When Jesus was asked, "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" He bounced the question back to the inquirer: *What does God's law say?* The man answered, *Love God with all you've got and love your neighbor.* Then the man followed up, *Who is my neighbor?* The man asked this question because Jewish experts in the law taught that the command to love one's neighbor referred to fellow Jews. It was easy then to believe that you were *not* required to love those different from you. So Jesus answers with the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritans were part Jew, part Gentile—racial half-breeds—and there were centuries of hostility between Jews and Samaritans. If there was anyone in the story with a reason to pass by on the other side, it was the Samaritan; but he is the one who stops and helps the man. Jesus makes this Samaritan the unlikely hero of the story! So Jesus is asking, *Who was a neighbor to the man who was robbed?* and the answer the man gave is obvious, "The one who had mercy on him," which brings us to our first point:

1. **Who is my neighbor?** Based on Jesus' story, our neighbor is anyone in need, regardless of who they are. We live in a world that has shrunk into a global neighborhood. The word "neighbor" in Greek literally means "nearby." It refers to the person next to you. But in the last century the world has become a global neighborhood. In the past, we lacked the awareness, access, and ability to help those far away—not so today.

- Awareness - A century ago, we may not have known what was happening in our own nation, let alone the world. Today, we live in a media-saturated, Internet connected, cell phone equipped world in which anything that happens anywhere is instantly available to everyone.
- Access - A century ago, no one flew anywhere; international travel was done primarily by boat, it took weeks and was rare. Today, we can be on any continent in the world in less than 24 hours.
- Ability - In the past 50 years, our understanding of the complex relationship between poverty, health, culture, and economics has made it possible to transform poverty.

Now, Stearns writes, "...for the first time in the history of the human race, we have the awareness, the access, and the ability to reach out to our more desperate neighbors around the world" (p. 104). This should be good news for the poor, but unfortunately, the gap between the rich and poor continues to grow. The rich nations get richer, and the poor get poorer. Half of our planet lives on less than \$2 a day, and they are our neighbors. Can we just pretend we don't see them? Can we look the other way, walk on by, and live in our comfortable bubble? No, because...

It's always personal. When a child dies from hunger, dirty water, or malaria, it's always personal to that child's parents and family. And it's personal to us because that child is our neighbor.

2. **Understanding poverty.** We have all kinds of assumptions about poverty and the poor. We've grown up in the land of opportunity where we believe that if we work hard, we will get

ahead—and generally, we will. Consequently, it's easy to believe that if someone is poor, they must be lazy or stupid, but it's not that simple. If we're going to see the poor as God sees them, we need to repent of our judgmental attitudes and realize that not everyone has had the same advantages. We're blessed, and the Bible is clear that when God blesses us, it's so we can bless others. God told Abraham in **Genesis 12:2-3**, "*I will bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*" Rather than thinking we're superior to the poor, we should humbly thank God for the advantages we've had and then pay them forward—share the blessing. We shouldn't feel guilty for being blessed; but we should feel guilty for not blessing other, for being the priest or the Levite that ignores our neighbor and walks by on the other side. Stearns wrote, "It is not our fault that people are in poverty, but it is our responsibility to do something about it" (p. 123). So how do we solve poverty? We start by listening to the poor. The worst mistake we can make is to see the poor as unable to help themselves, and see ourselves as their saviors. Solving poverty requires a holistic approach, one that addresses injustice in the system, as well as the individual elements of poverty. There are no simple solutions, but there are solutions. In Chapter 14, "Finally, the Good News," Stearns points out that we are making progress, and if we're going to be part of the solution, we have to remember three things:

- Every one of these hurting people are created in God's image and loved by him.
- Every one of these challenges has a solution.
- Every one of us can make a difference. (Stearns, pp. 161-162)

There are so many people suffering that it's tempting to just walk by as quickly as we can and forget the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, and the suffering. But they're our neighbors, and whatever we do for one of them, we do for Jesus. This is why...

3. It's always personal. We can't change everything, but we can change something. We can't help everyone, but we can help someone.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. [Read **2 Corinthians 9:6-15** together.] What is God's solution for dealing with the disparity in the world? In what ways does your answer instill in you a sense of responsibility as a steward of God's gifts? What is the promised result of a Christian's generosity to the poor?
2. Who's your neighbor? Do you identify more with the priest and the Levite or the Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37**? Even though we have the awareness, access, and ability to help others in our communities and around the world, what types of things prevent us from helping?
3. What type of stereotypes do you have about the poor? (Please give each other an umbrella of mercy with your honesty here.) Where do you think those stereotypes come from? What would your life have been like without access to clean water, free education, a safe place to live, etc.—or to put it another way, what wouldn't you have that you presently enjoy?
4. How do we solve poverty? (That's a big question, but run with it for a bit.) Why is it important to give people opportunities instead of just handouts? Why should the answers to these questions be personal—something that engages you? How do we make them personal—something we'd naturally respond to if we found, say, a child in need on our doorstep?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

Watch the *Minutes* DVD together that you should have received in the mail from us last week. Consider Bob Pierce's quote, "Don't fail to do something just because you can't do everything." Take a moment and write down something you *could* do and share your ideas with the group. But don't commit to anything yet! Continue to pray. There is more to come!

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Ask the Lord to break our hearts with the things that break His heart.
- Ask God to help us to realize how very blessed we are without feeling guilt but a sense of purpose and generosity.
- Pray that God will help each of us to be part of the solution to poverty, and that He will give us direction as we explore opportunities and options as the series progresses.
- Bring other praises or requests to God that came up during the discussion.