



Seeing the world (and myself) through new eyes | Pastor Joe Wittwer | August 23, 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)

This week's sermon comes from Pastor Joe's heart, from his experience in Kenya. He shared the realities of what he saw and how he feels that God wants us to respond.

1. What I learned about the resource equation. Many of us know about the disparity between the world's poverty and our wealth. But it is one thing to read about poverty, and another thing to see it, touch it, smell it, and most importantly, come to know and love those who live in it. Here's the resource equation:

a. Much of the world lives in desperate need. Half of our world lives on less than \$3 a day. One in seven people in our world don't have enough food to sustain them, and over one billion people don't have access to clean water. The statistics are overwhelming; it's worse seeing it up close and in person.

b. We have so much. Joe reflected, "You couldn't help but feel the contrast between their poverty and our wealth. We have so much. We couldn't help but compare their homes to ours; their hospitals to ours; their schools to ours." In the comparison, we can't help but feel guilty. Don't feel guilty about your prosperity—feel grateful! Think of what can be done if you choose to help! Jesus says in **Luke 12:48**, "*When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.*" We have so much... so much will be required of us. One day we'll answer to God for what we did with what we have. We don't need to feel guilty or ashamed for having a lot; we just don't want to feel guilty or ashamed when we stand before God and answer for what we did with it.

c. We need to do what we can. We can't solve every problem; we can't meet every need; but we can do something. Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, said, "Don't fail to do something just because you can't do everything." Just because we can't do everything, we shouldn't get paralyzed and do nothing. We can't do nothing! Jesus says in **1 John 3:17-18**, "*If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?*" ¹⁸ *Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.*"

2. What I learned about the value of mission trips:

Joe began by confessing his skepticism of missions trips. He questioned their effectiveness: "Most of the time, don't we go do some nice things, come home feeling better about ourselves, but nothing really changes?" His trip to Kenya transformed his understanding of mission trips because he learned that you can do the following:

a. Make the personal connection. Build relationships – it's one thing to know about poverty; it's another thing to *know the poor*. When you put a face on the statistics, it changes everything.

b. Expand your worldview. When you remove someone from their comfort zone, when you immerse them in new cultures or environments, you accelerate learning. If you want to expand your world view, get out of your world and into theirs. Go on a mission trip!

c. Learn how to help by listening to the poor. If you want to know how to help the poor, you need to listen to the poor. If you want to help people come to Jesus, you have to know them, listen to them, and love them. There is no substitute for relationships, for being there.

d. Make a lasting difference. Missions trips must benefit the poor, not only change us. It's

not enough if we go and come back different; we need to do something that makes life better for them. We do that by sharing the Gospel! And we do something that alleviates their poverty. We bring good news in word and deed.

3. What I learned about helping the poor:

a. I don't know much. The first thing we can learn is that we don't know much. We need to learn from those we want to help. This is always the starting point. Don't assume that we know what to do and can go and save others. We don't know much.

b. The poor are smart and industrious. Many of us assume that the poor are stupid and lazy, and that is why they're poor. They're not. You have to be pretty entrepreneurial to live on a dollar a day!

c. The poor need partners, not just hand outs. We need to find a way to empower the poor, not make them dependent upon our donations. There are times when donations are needed and essential; but if that's all we do, we dis-empower the poor. We must find ways to empower them through partnership, and that's what most of them want.

4. What are we going to do?

a. Learn more. As a church we are going to purposefully work to get educated about the needs around our community and our world. We are going to learn more.

b. Send more. We are going to send more people on missions/service trips. We want to pick several spots around the world and locally where we can build long-term strategic partnerships for change.

c. Give more. As we gain an increased awareness of the need around us, hopefully each of us will become increasingly generous with our resources. As we give more we will direct more of it to truly helping the needy.

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

1. Have you ever been involved in a mission trip or had similar experience? To what extent did you find yourself feeling guilty for what you have? Did you feel like God was directing you to help others in need through your experience? Were there some ways in which your efforts to help were paralyzed by your inability to do everything?
2. When you reflect on Joe's experience in Kenya, to what extent do you feel wealthy? Read **Luke 12:48** and **1John 3:17-18**. How can these passages make us feel guilty? On the other hand, how can they provoke us to take up our responsibility for loving others?
3. All of us Christians are engaged in the Great Commission...to win people to Jesus. But if people don't have enough food, or clean water, sanitation, or other resources, how do those lacks hamper reception to the Gospel? What does it mean, then, to "share the Gospel in word and deed"?
4. Have you ever considered a mission trip or similar action close to home? What kinds of things would hold you back? What do feel like God is nudging you to do in the service of others?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- This week's message is a great opportunity to "Follow the Leader." Look for the simple opportunities around you this week to reach out and help someone...in the way they would want to be helped. Get to know someone in need, find out from them what they need.
- If there are ways you can simplify your life that will help you feel like you are better able to share with others, take a step this week. (A "garage sale for Jesus?")

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

- Thank God for the true wealth He's provided in His mercy and grace by sending His Son.
- Pray that God will open our hearts as individuals and as a church to learn more about those in need in Spokane and around the world, and that this learning will help lead us into action.
- Bring any other praises or requests before God that arose during your discussion.