

*"If you long to live out
your faith in a fresh, new
way—this book is for you!"*

— Bob Goff

BOTH

LIVING OUTSIDE
THE EITHER

OR OF YOUR
FAITH

NOEL BREWER YEATTS

In *Both*, Noel invites us to tag along—from the slums of Uganda and red-light districts of Thailand to the war-torn country of Ukraine. This journey will forever challenge the way you think about missions and help you live out your faith in a fresh, new way.

Bob Goff

Speaker, coach, author of *New York Times* best-selling books, *Love Does* and *Everybody Always*

For over a decade, I've served alongside Noel in some of the most brutal yet beautiful, gritty but grace-filled places around the world. In every situation, Noel has been the strong, compassionate voice that boldly speaks for those who cannot speak for themselves. In *Both*, the help and hope Noel brings through her life-changing work springs off the pages through her perspective-shifting words. I urge every Christian to sit with Noel as she broadens our minds and deepens our hearts for Jesus and a hurting world. Our lives and our purpose must be motivated by *Both*.

Lori Wilhite

Founder of Leading and Loving It, author of *Philippians: Chasing Happy*

Noel Brewer Yeatts walks the talk. I know because I've walked a few steps with her on her long, arduous journey of living out her faith across the globe to serve “the least of these.” In *Both*, Noel offers a much-needed challenge to the church: we must not choose between body and soul or between faith and works. The Christian is called to serve both and embody both. Noel's

life, ministry, and words challenge and convict me. And they give me hope that by being the body of Christ, we can serve other bodies—and their souls, too.

Karen Swallow Prior, Ph.D.

Author of *The Evangelical Imagination: How Stories, Images & Metaphors Created a Culture in Crisis*

Both is a message we desperately need today. Noel offers a fresh perspective for how faith reveals itself in love. She brilliantly shows how the good news is good, both for us and for the world.

Jud Wilhite

Senior pastor of Central Church, Las Vegas, Nevada; author of *Pursued*

Some leaders challenge you to think. Some leaders inspire you to take action. Noel Yeatts is the rare leader who does both. Her new book, *Both: Living Outside the Either/Or of Your Faith*, will challenge your perspective on missions and inspire you to believe that both help AND hope are possible.

Jenni Catron

Author, speaker, leadership & culture consultant

Noel Yeatts has given us a gift: a guidebook to change the world. Christian compassion gives hope because it brings help, spiritual and physical help.

Rev. Johnnie Moore

Author, *The New Book of Christian Martyrs*

President, The Congress of Christian Leaders

Noel Yeatts issues a profound call to believers everywhere to awaken to the spiritual and physical needs of those around the world. She challenges us to rethink what missions looks like and recognize love is an action. You'll find your heart set on fire through these pages.

Margaret Feinberg

Author of *More Power To You*

Noel Yeatts has written for all of us, a very challenging book that will cause you to never look at “missions” the same way again. With fantastic stories and illustrations, she vividly paints a new picture for what our daily lives should look like as faithful believers. This book will radically change the way you see mission work, and it has the potential to change your life.

Charles Billingsley

Concert artist/worship leader - Teaching pastor, Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia

I've been in ministry for over three decades, and Noel's reframing of the term "mission work" has greatly impacted my life and my ministry. She so beautifully marries the call of Christians to share the Gospel of Jesus AND to help meet life's basic needs like food and clean water. Partnering with Noel and World Help was the obvious choice for our Fearless Mom community, as we believe in her vision of helping meet both spiritual AND physical needs around the world. I'm thrilled that this book will help others to understand and embrace this approach to living out our faith each and every day.

Julie Richard
Founder of Fearless Mom

Brace yourself, not only for an exhilarating exploration that stirs your soul but also allows you to ponder life a little deeper, igniting a desire to take meaningful action. Through her incredible experiences working with diverse individuals from around the world, Noel emerges as an extraordinary living example of selfless giving, boundless love, and the unwavering commitment to share help and hope with those in need. Her journey serves as a shining beacon, inspiring us all to step beyond the confines of our comfort zones and make a difference in the lives of others. As you immerse yourself in the vibrant tapestry of her words, you'll be encouraged to embrace the needs of others with open arms, to reflect upon your own abilities to make a difference for the Kingdom.

Sarah Nuse
Founder and CEO of Tippi Toes, author of *Destined for Greatness*

My oldest daughter Noel was only twelve years old when I decided to take her on her first missions trip. I was recovering from my first of eighteen surgeries. The doctors told me I had cancer, and I might not survive. I wanted Noel to see the way the rest of the world lived and to see it from God's perspective. Fast forward to today—not only did I survive cancer, but I was also able to take Noel on many more trips around the world. Today, she leads World Help, the organization I founded more than thirty years ago. Noel has a heart of compassion for the most vulnerable people and some of the most remote places. And I could not be prouder.

Vernon Brewer
Founder, World Help

BOTH

Noel Brewer Yeatts

**LIVING OUTSIDE THE
EITHER/OR OF YOUR FAITH**

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All dates, place names, titles, and events in this account are factual. The names of some individuals have been changed in order to protect their privacy. Statistics used in this book were current at the time of publication.

For Pat, Riley, and Bentley.

I always take you with me.

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INTRO



JESUS IN DISGUISE

In a divided culture, Christians should
be the help and the hope, not the hate.
~ Carey Nieuwhof¹

A few years back, an Episcopal church in Davidson, North Carolina, became home to a very controversial statue. The sculpture is of a shrouded, obviously homeless man lying on a park bench by the church. The face and hands are obscured, but when you look closer, you see the nail-pierced feet of the man lying on the bench . . . and you realize it's Jesus.

Needless to say, the statue caused quite a stir in this wealthy community. Some church members, viewing it from a distance, thought the statue was human and reported the “homeless man” to the police, complaining of the nuisance and asking for him to be removed.

“That’s right. Somebody called the cops on Jesus,” a news article quipped.²

1 Carey Nieuwhof, “The Coming Church Split (It’s Not What You Think),” CareyNieuwhof.com, August 21, 2022, <https://careynieuwhof.com/the-coming-church-split-its-not-what-you-think/>

2 John Burnett, “Statue of a Homeless Jesus Startles a Wealthy Community,” NPR, April 13, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/04/13/302019921/statue-of-a-homeless-jesus-startles-a-wealthy-community>

Others claimed that it was undignified to portray the Son of God as a hobo, saying that it demeans the church and the neighborhood. One man even said it was “creepy.”

But I love the words of the minister of the church: “We believe that that’s the kind of life Jesus had. He was, in essence, a homeless person. This is a relatively affluent church, to be honest, and we need to be reminded ourselves that our faith expresses itself in active concern for the marginalized of society.”³

Mother Teresa once said, “When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed.”⁴ In the poor we meet Jesus, she explained, in his most distressing disguises.

Jesus in disguise.

Christ reminds us of this when He addresses His disciples in the book of Matthew: “As you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me.”⁵

Extending a helping hand in someone’s darkest hour is the gospel in its introductory form. It is a sign—a landmark, a lighthouse pointing to the shore . . . pointing to hope.

It’s a warm meal given in love to a refugee.
A cup of clean water for a thirsty child.
A lifesaving vaccine for a sick baby.

3 John Burnett, “Statue of a Homeless Jesus Startles a Wealthy Community,” NPR, April 13, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/04/13/302019921/statue-of-a-homeless-jesus-startles-a-wealthy-community>

4 “A Quote by Mother Teresa,” Goodreads, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/405714-when-a-poor-person-dies-of-hunger-it-has-not>

5 Matthew 25:40 (ESV)

Food and shelter for a refugee fleeing war.
A set of clean clothes for a homeless man.

Yet, instead of embracing this robust, holistic vision of how our faith is best expressed, we tend to make it an either/or choice—a carefully curated brand of the kind of Christian we are with little room to grow or expand.

It shouldn't come as a surprise. From our earliest experiences in life we are asked to see the world in black and white, to choose—a favorite color, food, music, song, place to travel, and the list goes on.

As we get older, the choices become more complicated—political party, church affiliation, denomination, kids' schools, friend groups, exercise routines, hobbies. You get the point.

Honestly, when I am asked to name my favorite anything I immediately tense up. It's just too much pressure. One thing? I have to name just one? I have learned that I am not a "favorite" kind of person. Maybe it is my people-pleasing personality, or maybe it is just that I love too many things.

Colors? Well, I really am partial to neutrals like black, white, and gray, but I love a good pop of color like yellow or green. And places to travel? How much time do you have? Church denominations? I have been a part of them all. Political party? Depends on the year. Music? Depends on the mood. Food? This one, I can tell you most definitely what I *don't* like: seafood.

Somebody can analyze later what this really says about me. Maybe I don't have favorites. Or maybe, I am afraid to choose.

Regardless, few of these choices, if any, are right and wrong or black and white. The truth is, most of life is lived in the gray. And too often we limit ourselves by living in the either/or when we could be living in the beauty and fullness of both. There's no way to be a perfect parent, or spouse, or Christian. But there are a million ways to be a faithful one.

Our world is so full of brokenness. Our communities can be so divisive. We sometimes only see what we are looking for. What if instead of looking for problems, conflict, brokenness, disease, and hunger, we opened our eyes and looked for signs of life?

What if we changed the conversation from what we can't do, to what we can? From those we can't help, to those we can. From guilt and charity to action, justice, and radical generosity.

What if we really could live beyond the either/or of our faith? A life that takes the gospel message so seriously that we care about the body and the soul, the physical and the spiritual. A faith so alive that we care about BOTH.

I believe Jesus is our best example of how to live this kind of life. In the words of author and pastor Louie Giglio:

Both things collide in the person of Jesus. Jesus is evangelism embodied. He's God in human flesh. That's evangelism at its core. It's heaven sending mercy and hope to earth. So Jesus was all about evangelism. That was his final mission: to give his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. That was his driving purpose. So you can't say, 'Well Jesus was just a philosopher or a teacher or a healer.' No, Jesus was an evangelist. . . . He was always locked on the mission of the cross. But on the way to the cross he healed

the blind, he touched the lepers, he embraced prostitutes, he gave dignity to women and other marginalized people, he spoke out against injustice. He did some of those things to show he was the Messiah. But he did all of those things because God has a heart of compassion for people. The more we talk about Jesus, the more we see both of those things co-existing happily.⁶

The following pages will take you on a journey that gives you a glimpse into this kind of life—all it could be, and all it could change.

Together we will learn how to identify the pitfalls of disembodied faith throughout history and in our own lives. What it means to live out our faith according to Jesus's radical new kingdom rules. How valuing the needs of a whole person—body and soul—is holy, just, and transformational. And how embracing a life of “both” can meet the needs of people around the world and revitalize our own faith.

Living an integrated life of faith—one that embraces the sacred value and messy humanity of others near and far—is the next revolutionary chapter of “missions” as we know it. It's how we change the world for Christ. It's how we, ourselves, are changed.

Join me as we discover the power of BOTH.

6 Drew Dyck, “Louie Giglio: Passion for a Generation-Part 2,” outreachmagazine.com, April 22, 2016, <https://outreachmagazine.com/interviews/16583-louie-giglio-passion-for-a-generation-part-2.html>

CHAPTER ONE



BEGINNING WITH BOTH IN MIND

THE BITTER AND THE SWEET

The aroma of Guatemalan coffee began to wake me up as I looked down on the hazy valley below. This was a place I had come to love; not just for the beauty, but for the people, the food, the culture, and the work—the beautiful, messy, heartbreaking work.

The air was still a bit cool and damp, as if it were trying to distract me from what was to come. But I knew better. Soon the temperatures would rise with a vengeance, and the air would become thick and unforgiving, dripping with humidity. But for now, it was just perfect. And I soaked up every single, fleeting second.

But as much as I enjoyed this Central American country, it was also a place that had taught me hard lessons about that thin line between life and death. How the lack of food and clean water affects even the tiniest of lives.

On one of my many visits, I met a little boy named Lex, who had been buried alive just days after his birth and saved by a neighbor. I attended the funeral of a baby boy we had tried to

help just the day before. He fell ill during the night and died on the way to the hospital. Seeing his mother standing over his small casket was more than I could take—too much pain and sorrow to absorb in the space of a moment—and something I will never forget.

I held a little boy whose skin was about to burst with the fluid building up in his body. Local doctors informed the family he

... poverty robs
people of choices.

had cancer and would not make it. We did not want to give up on this child and were determined to get him help. But days later, he passed away. I could tell you the stories of so many others—Diego, Margarite, Jose. For some, our help arrived too late. But for others, we were just in time.

More than any other place I have traveled, Guatemala is where I learned about the lives of those living in extreme poverty and how that poverty robs people of choices. And how, if left uninterrupted, it would become a vicious cycle that continues on for generations.

Despite all the things I loved about Guatemala, my heart could not ignore its dark side: how the lives of so many were cut short, just because they lacked access to basic resources. This place—the contagious joy and the overwhelming sorrow of it—had profoundly affected me.

THE END OF MISSIONS

I was 12 when I started traveling internationally with my dad; I thought I knew what “missions” was all about. I was full of pas-

sion. I was getting to serve people in ways that would shape me forever. But I didn't truly comprehend the magnitude of what drew me to this work. I had a stereotypical understanding of the word "missions"—one that limited the scope of its intended effect. And for years, I continued to approach my work in the same well-intended but stunted way.

Years later, I found myself in Guatemala that summer morning, drinking coffee at the top of a hill overlooking the breathtaking scenery and reflecting on my life's work. What did it all really mean? I had never felt "called" to traditional missions like so many before me. I never thought God wanted me to be a full-time missionary. And yet here I was—twenty plus years in—doing what I thought was "missions" work. I was confused and restless.

I realized at that moment how tired I was of the word "missions." How it had come to communicate something to which I could no longer relate. I couldn't find what I felt so strongly about within the space of that one little word—*missions*. After hearing it so many times, it had become another Christian catchphrase that cheapened the work I believed in by reducing it to a label and a choice.

As one by one these realizations hit, my mind started spinning. I could almost feel the old, worn-out parts of my heart begin to stir. A new passion started bubbling up inside me. One that wanted to disrupt things a bit, to change the way things have been done for hundreds of years, to breathe new life into this work, and to boldly join a new kind of people on a new kind of mission.

As I sat there wrestling through some of these feelings, the

following words poured out, and I typed them as fast as I could on my phone:

I'm on a mission to end missions.

You see I don't like that word 'missions,' and I haven't for some time. I don't like it because it separates this work that we do from our 'real' lives. By defining it, we make it a choice. Something we

... it's all the same life—the good, the beautiful, and the ugly; the ups and downs; the highs and lows; the happy and the heartbreaking, the interesting and the seriously disturbing. And God can be found in all of it.

can choose to do or not do, a project we can choose to get involved in or not. A trip we can choose to go on or not go on.

I used to think I had to separate everything . . .

keep my personal and fun life separate from my 'mission work.' Now I know that what's more authentic is embracing it all—the good and beautiful and the hard and ugly—all at the same time.

So that means one minute I'm posting an article on how women and young girls around the world are being forced into the sex trade, and the next post is happy faces with my kids on a ball field. What I've learned is that it's all the same life—the good, the beautiful, and the ugly; the ups and downs; the highs and lows; the happy and the heartbreaking, the interesting and the seriously disturbing. And God can be found in all of it. He is not absent.

I'm not saying I completely understand why God allows suffering, and I won't try to justify it with cliché answers. The truth is I'm not sure I will ever fully understand suffering, pain, and poverty; and most days, I simply can't stand it.

And while I want to scream over senseless shootings and murders and break down crying when I see children suffer because they have no food or water, I hold on to the only truth I know: that a day is coming when the world is made new, and I long for that new world.

But until then, my calling, your calling, and the calling of all who claim to follow Jesus Christ, should be to restore hope. No judging, just love. No handouts, but a hand out of poverty. No guilt, but true compassion that comes only from meeting people right where they are.

This is what it truly means to live out our faith.

It's not called missions—it's called life.

I wrote those words more than six years ago, and yet, I feel them even more strongly today. Perhaps I would have spent a little more time to flesh them out and perfect the wording if I knew they were going to end up in a book. But, in essence, this is still what I believe and serves as the foundation of this book.

**It's not called
missions—it's
called life.**

But ending missions? Really? As the leader of a global “missions” organization, that might create a few problems. So, let me explain.

WHAT IF?

First of all, let me be clear. I come from a long line of missions and ministry. Traditional missions has always been a part of my life, and I have a deep respect for the work that generations of missionaries have done to spread the hope of the gospel around the world. If it were not for them, I wouldn't be where I am or doing what I am doing today.

That being said, I do long for a *reimagining* of missions. I long for a reclamation of what's helpful and right and good, and a casting off of all the ways it has been co-opted or mismanaged.

I believe if you truly
love something, you
long to see it healed.

It is love—not disdain, or cynicism, or disrespect—behind my questions and criticisms. I believe if you truly love something, you long to see it healed. You long to see it whole and flourishing. I long to see missions transformed in a way that not only changes us, but changes the world.

Deconstruction has become such a trendy buzzword in recent years, especially when talking about faith. It seems as if everyone is “deconstructing” their faith these days, especially high-profile religious celebrities. And it seems like most deconstruction stories do not have happy endings.

But not all deconstruction is bad. Reevaluating our faith can be a good and healthy thing. Asking questions, challenging the status quo, and building a faith of our own can be beneficial. It can even, in the end, strengthen our faith. I believe deconstructing “missions” does not have to be a bad thing either.

The dictionary defines a missionary as:

- someone who attempts to convert others to a particular doctrine or program
- someone sent on a mission—especially a religious or charitable mission to a foreign country
- one who is to witness across cultures¹

This, to me, is the traditional meaning of those words. But in the context of our faith and the original intent of Jesus, what should the definitions be?

What if missions is really more about truly loving our neighbors? What if it is more about teaching people how to live on earth, not just how to get to heaven? What if we didn't have to choose between the physical and spiritual when meeting people's needs? What if we didn't have to choose between social justice and salvation? What if it could really be about *both*?

What if missions is really more about truly loving our neighbors?

It's said that in order to change things and envision the future you desire, you have to start with the end in mind.² So, if we want the earth to look a little more like heaven, how will that change the way we live today? How will it change the way we do "missions" today?

Even though I have my own issues with the word, I don't want the way we do missions to be the punch line of a joke. I don't

¹ Vocabulary.com, s.v. "Missionary," accessed February 13, 2023, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/missionary>

² "Habit-2." FranklinCovey, December 28, 2022. <https://www.franklincovey.com/habit-2/>

want it to be a badge of honor or a check in the box of what good Christians do. I don't want it to be an internship of sorts to complete in order to be a "good Christian."

I want it to be a *way of life*—a way of life for a person of faith. The colors that paint a picture of what we believe for the world to see. We go to the ends of the earth not because we believe we are the heroes and not because God needs us to accomplish His work, but because it is an expression of the faith we say we take so seriously.

We go to the ends of the earth not because we believe we are the heroes and not because God needs us to accomplish His work, but because it is an expression of the faith we say we take so seriously.

It reminds me of what best-selling author Bob Goff said: "There's nothing wrong with matching shirts and wristbands. We just don't need them anymore . . . We don't need to go on 'missions trips'

any longer. Jesus's friends never called them this. They knew love already had a name."³

The truth is, Jesus never went on a mission trip, did He? But the way He loved and lived His life was something the world had never seen. Everywhere He went, lives were changed, people were healed, and hope was restored.

³ Bob Goff, *Everybody, Always*, page 55.

When we forget about “missions” and call this what it really is—living out our faith—I believe a new, freeing world opens up to us. One that allows us to look at things differently, evaluate things differently, and live differently.

As a result of this small shift, we will see “mission trips” as simply an *exercise* of our faith, not the culmination. Our imaginations will ex-

pand beyond a single “missions emphasis week” at church and spill over into every day of the week, wherever we are. We won’t have to wait for

We will seek justice and healing and restoration of the world because, as children of God, we ourselves have been justified, healed, and restored.

the custom T-shirt to give us permission to go and make disciples. We won’t be satisfied with part-time faithfulness or waiting around for God to clean up the world. We will seek justice and healing and restoration of the world because, as children of God, we ourselves have been justified, healed, and restored. Instead of occasional volunteers, we will see ourselves as whole participants in the kingdom work of making the world new.

Missions is how we *live*. It should consume us in our homes, across the street, in our churches, in our places of work, and yes, in places of injustice around the world too. It should inspire us to seek human flourishing, to make wrong things right, and to bring the kingdom of God to the home we all share.

That is the story of World Help and the story behind our anchoring belief in “help and hope.” You see, we believe that

without food, access to clean water, and medicines that the body needs, the faith we profess means very little. But without faith that feeds the soul, meeting those physical needs is just a short-term fix. It's when you focus on both *body and soul* that true transformation happens in someone's life. It's when you meet the urgent physical and spiritual needs of today that hope has the space to dream of a better tomorrow.

And while some may refer to our work simply as “missions,” I challenge them to broaden their thinking and to open their eyes to what God intends for us to do and be. To see that changing the world comes not from how much we are involved in “missions” but from lives filled with love. This love is living and expansive. It naturally spills out from our homes to our neighborhoods, our communities, and around the world. A love that compels us to respond to the needs of our world with both help and hope.

Both. Never either/or. Never one or the other. It is the combination of meeting people's physical and spiritual needs that gives help for today and hope for tomorrow to people in need. *Both* is the secret that empowers us to live out our faith and truly change the world.



Scan the QR code for photos, videos, and more details about the stories from around the world shared in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

CHASING AFTER EITHER/OR

SANITIZED FAITH

A few years ago, I boarded a flight with a colleague and made my way to my seat. I noticed my coworker immediately proceeded to sanitize everything around him. This was pre-COVID. I have to say, he was ahead of his time.

With the methodical approach of a criminal trying to cover his tracks at a crime scene, he wiped his seat, then opened the tray table and wiped it down, too. He wiped down the armrests, and because he had a window seat, he even wiped down *the entire wall*. I'm sure it was the cleanest airplane seat that had ever been (or ever would be). I watched him in disbelief and mild amusement. His dedication to the cause was something to behold.

Finally, he appeared satisfied with his work and was about to sit down . . . when he realized he was in *the wrong row*. His seat was actually a row back. And again, everyone around watched curiously as he repeated the whole tedious ritual.

Telling that story used to be funny, but post-pandemic, there's

a certain tinge of irony to it. Most of us wouldn't bat an eyelash if we saw someone doing this today.

The point is, we all can relate to the desperate need to protect ourselves and to make ourselves feel safe and clean. And hand sanitizers, in whatever form, are a small measure to help us do just that.

But what we don't like to admit or acknowledge about sanitizer is that some research shows it can actually lower your immunity and make you even more susceptible to germs.

A *New York Times* article about the pros and cons of hand sanitizer said that if it doesn't contain a high enough percentage of alcohol, then it doesn't kill any bacteria, and, "If anything . . . the gel seemed to mobilize the bacteria, spreading them around the hand instead of killing them."¹

According to a World Health Organization report, our obsession with germ killing has resulted in antibiotic-resistant bacteria in every corner of the globe. Sanitizers, in fact, can leave residue. This residue continues to kill bacteria but not effectively, which allows stronger bacteria to survive and develop resistance.² So basically, hand sanitizer makes us *feel* clean, but the reality under a microscope might be totally different.

I started thinking about how this idea relates to our faith and the gospel. You see, while sanitizing our lives makes sense when fighting a virus, it doesn't make sense when applied to our faith.

1 Franklin, Deborah. "Hand Sanitizers, Good or Bad?" *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, March 21, 2006. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/21/health/hand-sanitizers-good-or-bad.html>.

2 Bill Saporito, "Why You Should Stop Using Hand Sanitizer," *Time*, May 12, 2014, <https://time.com/96112/why-im-breaking-up-with-hand-sanitizer/>.

Let me explain. A few years ago, I came home from a trip to Southeast Asia a bit stunned. I had found myself on the front lines of human trafficking—and I was not prepared for what I experienced. It was dark. It was dirty. It was vulgar. It was dehumanizing. It was degrading. It was overwhelming. At times, I felt hopeless.

I had wiped away
any trace of God's
presence because
I couldn't tolerate
the backdrop.

My first Sunday back at my home church was a blur except for one part of the sermon. I remember my pastor saying, "God is with us in the dark places." And at that moment, I thought, *No, I'm not so sure about that.* I had just experienced some pretty dark places, and even though I looked, I couldn't find God there. I wanted to desperately, but it all just felt too filthy and wicked for God.

I struggled to process this overwhelming feeling for months before the realization crashed down on me like a ton of bricks: *It was me. I was the one who made God disappear.* God was not absent; I had just decided He did not fit there. I had decided He did not belong there in all that darkness and despair. Just like someone who is desperate to feel clean and safe from a deadly disease, I had reached for my sanitizer. But what I had sanitized instead was the gospel. I had wiped away any trace of God's presence because I couldn't tolerate the backdrop. What I ended up with felt clean, but it was hollow—it lacked substance. Not at all like good news. Not at all like the gospel.

A CASTLE, A CONGREGATION, AND A COVER-UP

Cape Coast Castle is located in central Ghana. This castle was originally used for trading and then as a fort. But during the height of the transatlantic slave trade, it was primarily used to house captives while they awaited transport to the New World.³

Dungeons beneath the structure held up to 1,500 slaves at one time for as long as three months. Hundreds were crammed into tiny rooms. They were chained and forced to lie in their own urine and feces for months.⁴ Can you imagine the smells and the absolutely horrific conditions?

Today, Cape Coast Castle is a tourist attraction. I heard a conference speaker share about taking a tour there. Her tour guide led the group through the dungeons, and

And all the
while there was
unspeakable
suffering right
beneath them.

as they stood in those rooms where so many were once chained, he told them something unthinkable. He said, “Guess what is right above these dungeons? A chapel!”⁵

Think about that. A chapel. A place of worship right above those horrible dungeons. So, while hundreds were held captive, people in the chapel above probably sang, prayed, read Scripture,

³ “Cape Coast Castle.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, February 5, 2023.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Coast_Castle.

⁴ Ugc. “A Former ‘Slave Castle’ on Africa’s Gold Coast Still Stands.” Atlas Obscura. Atlas Obscura, June 29, 2016.
<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/cape-coast-castle>

⁵ “Trauma as a Place of Service—Q Talk.” YouTube. YouTube, March 20, 2020
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=YpDGzHb5DnQ>.

and perhaps even took an offering for the less fortunate. And all the while there was unspeakable suffering right beneath them.

Then the guide said, “Heaven was above but hell was below.”⁶

Fast forward to World War II Germany.

In his book, *When a Nation Forgets God*, Erwin Lutzer shares this powerful eyewitness account of a Christian who lived in Germany during the Nazi Holocaust:

We had heard stories of what was happening to the Jews, but we tried to distance ourselves from it, because, what could anyone do to stop it? A railroad track ran behind our small church and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized it was carrying Jews like cattle in cars!

Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sounds of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews en route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us.

We knew exactly at what time that whistle would blow, and we decided the only way to keep from being so disturbed by the cries was to start singing our hymns. By the time that train came rumbling past the church yard, we were singing at the top of our voices. If some of the screams reached our ears, we'd just sing a little louder until we could hear them no more.

⁶ “Trauma as a Place of Service—Q Talk.” YouTube. YouTube, March 20, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=YpDGzHb5DnQ>.

*Years have passed and no one talks about it anymore. But I still hear the train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me; forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians yet did nothing to intervene.*⁷

They just sang louder.

Fast forward to recent years where more and more victims of sexual abuse in the church have come forward. The crisis spans denominations and all levels of leadership, affecting thousands of people over the past few decades alone. What we are seeing now is a mass reckoning.

In his scathing article, Russell Moore, the former head of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, called the sexual abuse scandal of the SBC, "the Southern Baptist apocalypse." He went on to say:

Who cannot now see the rot in a culture that mobilizes to exile churches that call a woman on staff a 'pastor' or that invite a woman to speak from the pulpit on Mother's Day, but dismisses rape and molestation as 'distractions' and efforts to address them as violations of cherished church autonomy? In sectors of today's SBC, women wearing leggings is a social media crisis; dealing with rape in the church is a distraction.

I only know firsthand the rage of one who wonders while reading what happened on the seventh floor of that Southern Baptist building, how many children were raped, how many people were assaulted, how many screams were silenced,

⁷ "Lutzer, Erwin W. When a nation forgets God: 7 lessons we must learn from Nazi Germany. Moody Publishers, 2015.

*while we boasted that no one could reach the world for Jesus like we could. That's more than a crisis. It's even more than just a crime. It's blasphemy. And anyone who cares about heaven ought to be mad as hell.*⁸

What do these three stories have in common? What do the dungeons of the transatlantic slave era, the cattle cars of Nazi concentration camps, and the hidden corners of churches across our own nation have in common?

For one, they were locations where unspeakable evil took place; second, they were all happening in the direct vicinity of worship, prayer, and large gatherings of Christians. I believe these

... the lived experiences of human beings made in God's image have been utterly neglected, ignored, or worst of all, quietly tolerated.

incidents would not have happened without a deliberate sanitizing of the gospel.

I believe we have sanitized our faith to the point that the real, everyday prob-

lems and physical needs—the lived experiences of human beings made in God's image—have been utterly neglected, ignored, or worst of all, quietly tolerated.

And just like that former dungeon on the Ghanaian coast, there are still many dungeons here on earth. Dungeons of poverty, dungeons of disease, dungeons of slavery, abuse, fear, and hopelessness.

⁸ Moore, Russell. "This Is the Southern Baptist Apocalypse." ChristianityToday.com. Christianity Today, May 22, 2022. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/may-web-only/southern-baptist-abuse-apocalypse-russell-moore.html>

As people of faith, we cannot remain numb and blind to the suffering around us. No, we need to go into the dungeons—reach right into the dungeons of this world, embrace the dungeons of the world, charge into the dungeons of the world—until the dungeons look a little more like heaven. That is what our lives should be all about.

THE COST OF SEPARATING BODY AND SOUL

Sometimes people question my work and the ethos of World Help. People who don't associate themselves with a particular faith may say, "Why do you focus so much on spiritual development?" At the same time, most Christ-followers would ask the opposite: "Why the humanitarian aid? It's only a temporary fix for a spiritual problem."

They are both valid questions. What is more important—meeting physical needs for today or feeding the soul? But they are questions that only make sense if you actually believe you can separate the two. We have been conditioned to believe in this false dichotomy, and if you grew up in church, you probably received a double dose.

Our culture teaches us that the only way to succeed is to be a workaholic—to be a machine, always producing. It's only in recent years that the ideas of rest, mental health, and work-life balance have gained popularity and traction.

Growing up in church, I heard the numbers of attendance and salvation. In some churches there were (and still are) literal signs on the wall with the numbers on them like the scoreboard at

a basketball game. For some time, these were the only metrics used to measure how a church or ministry was doing.

And in “missions” it was true as well. We learned to obsess over counting how many hands were raised during the sinner’s prayer or how many people rededicated their lives to Christ. These precious professions of faith became a sort of currency, like little badges of honor to prove the success of the church’s work on “the mission field.”

I vividly remember my first “missions” trip to Korea as a child. I was with my dad and a group of college students. On the bus, I sat watching an older couple with us intentionally toss tracts out the windows to people on the street.

If you don’t know what a tract is, it is basically a small evangelistic booklet or pamphlet. They are not as common today, but they were a staple of a “good Christian” when I was growing up.

A friend shared how when she was in college, she worked as a server at Olive Garden. She said the after-church lunch crowd on Sundays was by far the worst shift to work. The people were characteristically grumpy, rude, and impatient. None of the servers wanted that shift and would always trade with the new team members who didn’t know better. And to add insult to injury, let’s just say these church people were not the best tippers. She told me how many of them left a tract that looked like a dollar bill, instead of a real tip.

Now, don’t get me wrong. I am not making fun of the use of tracts. There are countless people who have found God through literature like this. In fact, even today in some persecuted countries where people face death for sharing their faith, “gospel bal-

loons” filled with literature are sent to share the love of Christ with the otherwise unreachable. What I am saying is that when we do have the opportunity to reach people in a personal way—but opt instead to throw our “message of hope” out the window—it gives the appearance of only caring about a person’s final destination and not actually caring about, well, *them*.

Did the tracts thrown out the bus window or left in a restaurant booth help anyone? Probably. Could that work have been more strategic? Absolutely yes. And could it have been done in a way that also showed we cared about their lives, their struggles, their hopes, and dreams? Yes. It could have accomplished both.

There is nothing wrong with good, old-fashioned “soul winning.” But there is a danger in this as well. When we elevate soul counts over people, we fall back into bad habits that have been around for thousands of years.

THE ROOTS OF EITHER/OR FAITH

The idea that the physical body is separate and inferior to the eternal soul can be traced back to the first few centuries after Christ.

Heresies like Gnosticism and Docetism taught that the body was the source of all evil, too lowly to be welcomed into the eternal kingdom of God. They denied the reality of the incarnation and claimed that though Jesus appeared to be a real human, He didn’t have actual flesh and bones.

Why was this idea so devastating?

Well, if you can deny that Jesus chose to assume a human body, engage in the physical human experience, and suffer a human death, why should the bodies of other people made in His image matter to you? Why concern yourself with the experiences of the poor and the suffering of the sick? After all, if heaven is the only goal, what happens on earth is no longer your responsibility, right? If the body is the source of all suffering and evil, why bother comforting the afflicted or seeking justice for the oppressed?

One article sums it up like this:

Unfortunately, traces of Gnostic thought continue to permeate the thinking of many well-meaning Christians today. For example, some Christians think that only two things will last into eternity: God's Word and the souls of men and women—an emphasis on the spiritual and an exclusion of the physical. But this is wrong. The Bible explicitly teaches that not only will these two last into eternity but so will our bodies, in a glorified state (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44). . . . James warns us that 'pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world' (James 1:27). However, don't make the mistake that believing the converse is true either, that the body is more important than the spirit. Both have equal importance in the eyes of God.⁹

⁹ Jeter, Derrick G. "Mind over Matter: The Heresy of Gnosticism Both Then and Now." Crosswalk.com. Crosswalk.com, February 8, 2010. <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/mind-over-matter-the-heresy-of-gnosticism-both-then-and-now-11625938.html>.

I love this quote because it shows that God cares about our bodies and bodily needs so much that when we die, we are given a new body in a “glorified state.” And when Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared not as a spirit but in a real body. And while His body was incorruptible, think about this: In the days following Jesus’s resurrection, what do we see Him doing? Not only do we find Him showing the scars on His very real body, but we also find Him eating. And why? Because that is what a real

**Our bodies are
made in the very
image of God,
and they matter.**

body needs to survive. And that is what people who are alive do. Our bodies are made in the very image of God, and they matter.

When it comes down to it, if you reduce the point of life to either/or, all or nothing, body or soul, us or them, then you never have to wade into the messiness of both. You deny the gift of seeing the full image of God in a person. You begin to dehumanize those around you by reducing them to a soul to be saved or damned.

The truth is, the “both” we’re talking about—the both that sees the needs of a whole person—is rarely certain, never safe, and hardly ever predictable. But we can almost always find the beauty in it if we are willing to look hard enough. In fact, it’s in the messiness of both where we find God Himself.

“THIS IS NOT MY HOME”

It was the end of a long day, and I was completely overwhelmed. Every single one of our partners seemed to be in crisis. The pandemic had pushed people already living in extreme poverty to

the brink, and food was, by far, the most crucial need. But it didn't stop there.

I watched in utter disbelief as the horrific events in Afghanistan unfolded on the screen in front of me. It was August 2021, and the United States had just announced plans to pull out of the country after decades of military presence. I'm sure you remember watching the crowds of people rush to the Kabul airport, fighting to get in, and literally climbing onto the wheels of moving planes to escape.

The human suffering was more than I could bear, and my only coherent thought was more of a plea: *Jesus, come quickly.*

But you know, I think when we proclaim, "this isn't our home," it inadvertently says to the rest of the world, "the pain you are experiencing now isn't really my problem. After all, I have heaven to look forward to."

As they desperately try to make sense of humanitarian disasters like this, well-meaning people of faith often repeat a common refrain: "We need to remember this is not our home." In other words, the here and now is just a waiting room for eternity.

I know people have good intentions when they say this. I've probably said it myself. It's easy to say things like this when the human suffering we see can't be explained. It helps us remember where we are going, and that this earth is our temporary home.

But you know, I think when we proclaim, "this isn't our home,"

it inadvertently says to the rest of the world, “the pain you are experiencing now isn’t really my problem. After all, I have heaven to look forward to.”

The incarnation itself shows us that the here and now matters to God too. The nitty gritty experience of life in a human body matters so much that Jesus came to us in the form of a baby and lived 33 years in this world before he went “home” to the right hand of the Father. The kingdom of heaven isn’t what we’re waiting for; the kingdom of heaven is here. It is now.

In Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist, calling for repentance, says, “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.”¹⁰

Author Gabe Lyons writes extensively about our calling as Christ’s followers to restore:

Telling others about Jesus is important, but conversion isn’t their only motive. Their mission is to infuse the world with beauty, grace, justice, and love. I call them restorers because they envision the world as it was meant to be, and they work toward that vision. Restorers seek to mend the earth’s brokenness. They recognize that the world will not be completely healed until Christ’s return, but they believe the process begins now as we partner with God. Through sowing seeds of restoration, they believe others will see Christ through us, and the Christian faith will reap a much larger harvest.¹¹

¹⁰ Matthew 3:2 (MSG)

¹¹ Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: The Good News About the End of Christian America*, page 47.

You see, we are meant to be at work bringing heaven TO earth—not biding our time, waiting for something better. And while this may not be our forever home, *it is our home right now*. God is inviting us to restore all that has been broken. To build His kingdom right here on earth. To restore everything that sin has taken away.

Have you sanitized your faith to the point where it makes you feel safe in your world? What would it take to reclaim it in all its uncertainty—in all its messiness?

So often throughout the church’s history, we have turned the gospel into something that only meets our needs and fits inside the safety of our churches and homes.

But it was meant for so much more. We were meant for so much more.



Scan the QR code for photos, videos, and more details about the stories from around the world shared in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE



THE MEANING OF BOTH

HALLELUJAH

As I woke up that morning in Uganda, I expected it to be a day like any other—one where our team would follow a set schedule, one with a predictable ending.

We had landed right after the president announced a new COVID-19 lockdown for the next forty-two days. All citizens had to choose a district to stay in for the next six weeks, so our time and travel were limited.

I had been to this country a number of times, so I knew our itinerary for the day. We would visit several of our programs, see a new maternity clinic under construction, and distribute some bicycles. I knew it would be hot because, it turns out, most places I travel are, to put it mildly, absolutely sweltering.

But that was the only thing that went as expected. Although the memories of the heat being so intense and relentless that I

felt as if I would melt are starting to fade, there are other memories from that day that I will never be able to shake.

We spent the morning with our Ugandan partner of more than twenty years. The length of that partnership means countless stories and countless lives changed. Years of listening—really listening—to what the true needs of this country are from the people who know best. Years of learning what our role is, and how we can come alongside and resource those who already know what to do and how to do it.

Most women here go through an entire pregnancy without seeing a doctor or receiving any kind of prenatal care.

The maternity clinic was impressive. I walked through it as the construction crew continued to work around me. Then, all at once, the weight of the impact of this building hit me. Safe motherhood is a luxury in places like rural Uganda, and this clinic will give so many new moms the help they desperately need.

The clinic is strategically located more than twenty miles from the nearest district hospital and forty miles from the nearest major hospital. And in a place where transportation is not easily accessible, those miles can mean a journey of days, not minutes. The small health facilities within this district face inadequate medical staff and insufficient supplies of medications; most are not equipped to handle much more than simple first aid.

Most women here go through an entire pregnancy without seeing a doctor or receiving any kind of prenatal care. That

means no assessment of the mother or baby and no education about nutrition or safe practices during pregnancy or delivery. Many Ugandans in remote areas still hold a belief in mysticism and will turn to natural remedies and witchcraft if they cannot obtain medical care.

So not only is this maternity clinic the first of its kind in the area, but it will also provide urgent physical care for the community while providing information to young women so they can better understand how to care for themselves.

Medical teams from the maternity clinic will visit the schools and villages to educate girls on the importance of self-respect, healthy living, and the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. The facility will also offer services beyond maternal care, including lab work, HIV/AIDS consultations, support and treatment, immunizations, child-care training, and so much more.

The maternity clinic will provide care for approximately twenty expectant mothers per month and assist about 420 new mothers each year. Like I said, impressive.

As we ended the tour of the facility, a crowd gathered in the middle of the construction. It was a group of church planters that serves in this area of Uganda—only this was a unique group. They had formed a co-op of sorts to help and support each other in their work, sharing resources and training.

Most of them regularly walked across entire counties just to reach their church members, especially during the pandemic when worshipers could not meet in person. During their visits, the church planters not only encouraged people in their faith, but also delivered the food and supplies families needed to stay

alive. With the new lockdown coming, this help would be needed more than ever.

Then I learned something astonishing: this dedicated group had been praying for *years* for bicycles to travel from home to home and town to town. I literally had to ask if I heard that right. Praying for years?

Our distribution that day wasn't commonplace or ordinary—it was an answer to hundreds of prayers. The gift of the bicycles meant the hope of Christ could be shared with hundreds more. It meant being able to deliver lifesaving supplies, to literally keep people alive.

One of the co-op leaders was reading from a list. The members had decided amongst themselves who needed these bikes the most. And, one by one, the names of the recipients were announced.

As I helped pull the bikes off the truck and hand them to the church planters, something incredible happened. One at a time, they broke out into a chorus of “Hallelujahs,” raising their hands and praising God at the top of their lungs. Their excitement and passion were contagious.

One church planter shared, “We have been walking on foot. Now our work has been simplified, and it means God is at work. You boosted it. Even as the churches are closing down, we are going to use these bicycles to reach people, to go where they are in their home places. Thank you very much. You are spreading the gospel far from where you are now. God bless you.”

I can't think of a better example of how meeting physical and spiritual needs ushers in help and hope. I'll never forget those joyful shouts of "hallelujah" as years of prayers were finally answered. And they will forever serve as a reminder that I, too, have so much for which to be thankful—so many hallelujahs to shout.

Sometimes
hallelujah arrives
on two wheels.

Sometimes a bicycle is the best way to deliver help and hope. And sometimes hallelujah arrives on two wheels.

GENIUS OF THE AND

In his groundbreaking book, *Built to Last*,¹ leadership researcher, expert, and author Jim Collins talks about an interesting concept. He discusses the "Tyranny of the OR" and the "Genius of the AND." He explains that the "Tyranny of the OR pushes people to believe that things must be either A or B, but not both."

But visionary companies free themselves of this thinking with the "Genius of the AND." They are able to hold two seemingly opposing concepts or goals at the same time. In the business world, this shows up in prioritizing things like purpose AND profit, analysis AND action, discipline AND creativity.²

Too many times over the years, I have heard the debate. Too many times, I have had to defend our work from the "Tyranny of the OR." Some people ask why we focus on only meeting peo-

¹ Collins, James C. *Built to Last*, 3rd ed., HarperBusiness, 2002.

² "Genius of the And," Jim Collins—Concepts—Genius of the AND. Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://www.jimcollins.com/concepts/genius-of-the-and.html>.

ple's spiritual needs. Don't we know they are dying from the lack of clean water? While others can't understand why we focus so much on "social justice" issues that appear not to have any effect on a person's soul.

Two seemingly opposing ideas or strategies. The "Tyranny of the OR."

But what if we embraced the "Genius of the AND"?

It makes me think of the time a Cuban church planter stood up to share his testimony in a room full of fellow church planters. This particular man caught my attention because he was wearing a familiar purple jacket and shirt that I recognized had come from one of World Help's aid shipments. We've had the privilege of supporting church-planting efforts in Cuba since 2010. That day, we listened to one courageous individual after another share stories of the everyday realities they faced in their work—hardship and danger, need and difficulty; but most of all, hope.

The man in the purple jacket told us how he felt a burden for a rural area of Cuba where there was no ministry work at all. Someone had donated a piece of land to him, and he had been able to build a small home where the locals could meet. Every Saturday, about sixty kids gathered at this new home. Through our partnership, the church planter was able to give each child a Bible—but he was also able to do so much more.

Seeing a collection of sports jerseys in one of our recent shipments, the church planter got an idea. Even though the shirts were sized for adults, he had them altered to fit the kids so they could form a soccer team with matching uniforms. You have to

understand what a big deal this is. To form a soccer team in this part of Cuba AND to have new matching uniforms was unheard of.

News of the matching soccer jerseys spread to surrounding villages, attracting excited crowds of children who hoped to be part of the new team. And let's just say, the church is growing! As he continued to share with us, the church planter asked for just one thing: more Bibles to help continue his work.

I love this story because there is no greater example of how everything we do all works together. From the donated clothes and aid that we are able to ship, to the training of church planters, to the provision of Bibles—all of that together is what changes lives. **Help and Hope.**

As I write this, World Help is celebrating our thirty-year anniversary. And let me tell you, a lot has changed in those three decades.

- In the early '90s, we were still using dial-up internet, and the world wide web had just been made available to everyone
- *Dances with Wolves* won the Oscar for best picture that year
- Parachute pants were all the rage
- The Soviet Union was dissolved
- Michael Bolton topped the charts with “When a Man Loves a Woman”
- A VCR could set you back \$399

- And if you were lucky enough to have a cell phone, it was probably the size of a small child

Thirty years ago, I was a college student working for my dad and helping stuff envelopes for this new organization he had just started. I stuffed *a lot* of envelopes in our little three-room office.

Our lives and the world have changed so much over the past thirty years.

In the very early days of World Help, 36 percent of the world survived on a dollar and ninety cents a day or less. Today it is down to 9 percent.³

Back then, 52 percent of the world's poorest people lived in East Asia and the Pacific. As of 2015, they represented only 6 percent.⁴

Approximately 35,000 children under the age of 5 died every day from preventable causes. We're talking hunger. Disease. Lack of clean water.

Today, that number has shrunk by more than half.⁵

And millions more people have access to God's Word through increased distribution and digital availability.

In the face of so many overwhelming issues today, it's easy to

3 "Schoch, Marta, Christoph Lakner, and Melina Fleury. "Progress toward Ending Poverty Has Slowed," World Bank Blogs, October 16, 2020. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/progress-toward-ending-poverty-has-slowed>.

4 "Poverty Trends: Global, Regional and National," Development Initiatives, December 2019. <https://www.devinit.org/resources/poverty-trends-global-regional-and-national/>

5 "Children: Improving Survival and Well-Being," World Health Organization. World Health Organization, September 8, 2022 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/children-reducing-mortality>

think that nothing we can do makes a difference.

But that simply isn't true. The numbers have significantly improved. And the World Help family has been a part of that.

In the face of so many overwhelming issues today, it's easy to think that nothing we can do makes a difference.

As I write this book, we have seen more than 80 million lives transformed through Bible distribution, church planting, clean water projects, lifesaving aid shipped and delivered to people in need, malnourished babies rescued and

brought back to health, women set free from the sex industry, and so much more.

To me, that's not a reason to stop; it's motivation to keep going.

1-2 PUNCH

A few years ago, I decided I wanted to try boxing. I'm not sure I was really all in, but I just wanted to give it a try.

Now, I like to work out and do CrossFit-type things, but I am no athlete—never have been. I was a cheerleader growing up, but that was before cheerleading was considered a sport.

But I thought boxing could add a bit of variety to my normal routine. It's a great way to de-stress and let off some steam, and, if I learned to do it right, it could even be a great self-defense tool. Right now, I think I am actually more of a danger to myself!

So I started with a couple of lessons. I ordered the right equipment. Like most sports, having the correct gear is the first step, right? When I took up golf, I think I cared more about my golf clothes and my club headcovers than I did about my game. Tennis had me all sorts of distracted by all the cute skirts you can wear.

I still remember when I decided to play softball in middle school. My dad was so excited. He had all daughters at the time, so he was over the moon when one of us finally wanted to play a sport. We went out and bought a nice glove, and he spent hours breaking that glove in. Putting oil on, working it in. One of my first times out on the field, I broke my finger. (I still don't know how it happened!) With a bulky new finger splint, I couldn't get that perfect glove on anymore, and that was the end of my illustrious softball career—but at least I had a nice glove.

So, with this history in mind, it was no surprise that when I took up boxing, I had to buy bright pink boxing gloves. I mean, what screams tough more than pink boxing gloves? Well, it doesn't really matter because my interest didn't last long. But it lasted long enough for me to learn a thing or two.

I learned there are four basic moves in boxing: the jab, the cross, the hook, and the bob and weave. I know, with all this groundbreaking knowledge, I'm practically Rocky—but bear with me.

One of the first movements I practiced is commonly referred to as the “1-2 punch.” It is a combination of two of the basic moves: the jab and the cross. More precisely, the “1-2 punch” is defined as “an especially forceful or effective combination or se-

quence of two things.” It’s the foundation for all other punches. If you don’t get it right, nothing else really works.

The 1-2 punch is a move that’s inseparable. You can’t achieve the same result if you do one move or the other by itself. If you just learn the jab (punch 1), your opponent knows what to expect.

Punch 2, the cross, is where all your power comes from. The combination is what makes the move so effective. If you don’t learn the 1-2, you won’t be competitive. All of boxing is based on this fundamental move.

Think about it. The phrase “1-2 punch” has become part of our everyday vocabulary. We use it to explain when two things—good or bad—happen together.

I can’t help but relate the “1-2 punch” to the mission of World Help—help for today and hope for tomorrow. Together, these “punches” change the world.

It reminds me of the day a special guest showed up at our offices.

Gary Habermas is an American historian, New Testament scholar, and philosopher of religion. He is most famous for his 1985 debate on the resurrection against then world-famous atheist Antony Flew. Gary was featured in the film *The Case for Christ*, and he also happens to be a friend of my dad’s.

As the story goes, when my dad was battling cancer and had just had surgery to remove a tumor, he could not speak because he had a tube down his throat. It was the night before Gary’s

famous debate with Flew, and yet, he still found time to come and visit my dad in the hospital.

Since my dad couldn't talk, my mom handed him a clipboard, and he scribbled on a piece of paper, "Beat Flew." Gary and my dad still reminisce about that moment every time they see each other. Now, years later, Gary was here to share with our team, and I couldn't wait to soak up every word. He started with a well-known passage found in Matthew:

"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"⁶

Now if you grew up in church, you are most likely familiar with these verses, right? We are taught from a very young age that the most important part of being a Christian is to love God and love others. But Gary Habermas told it in a fresh way. He pointed out that these commands are numbered. And they are numbered in a way found nowhere else in Scripture.

1: Love God

2: Love your neighbor

He told us that Jesus numbers "Loving God" as number 1 and "loving your neighbor" as number 2—the first and second greatest commandments! He said that nowhere else in the gospel do we hear a numerical list like this. But here we see number 1 and number 2. These are God's top two priorities.

⁶ Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV)

He explained that these instructions were higher in importance than all the things we frequently debate as Christians. Even for Gary, a world-renowned debater, loving our neighbor was far more important than being “right,” even on important matters.

He went on to talk about all the politics and bickering we see on social media or even in our own churches. And sadly, as we are debating all of these other things, these two commands often fall by the wayside.

Personally, I think it is easier for us to accept number 1, to say that loving God is most important. But loving your neighbor—what Jesus calls “number 2”—is crucial. The second greatest thing we can do after loving God is to love those around us.

How we go about doing number 1—loving God—is *directly related* to how we practice number 2, loving our neighbors. I

The second greatest thing we can do after loving God is to love those around us.

would almost go so far as to say that you can't do one without the other.

I think it's easy for us to get comfortable with number 1. We love God. We go to church. We read our Bibles, and we truly feel good about that. But is that the whole picture? The Bible also says the world will know we truly belong to God by how well we love each other.⁷

Let's be honest. Loving our neighbors can feel scary, sacrificial, and uncomfortable. But isn't that exactly how we are meant to live?

⁷ John 13:35 (NIV)

I believe the truest expression of our love for God is reflected in how well we love others. It is the manifestation of our faith. In order to love others well, we must love God well. And once we love God with everything, we will be driven to love others. We will be compelled to charge into the darkness with the love and hope of Christ. We will be burdened for what burdens the heart of God.

Loving God AND loving people.

Loving people—not in spite of, but *because*—because of our love for God.

A 1-2 punch.

Lives are changed when we first love God with all our heart.

The natural outcome of that love toward God is an outpouring of love for our neighbors. You can't have one without the other. We can't follow Christ without loving the people He made in His image.

KNOCKING OUT THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD

I was with my dad the first time I visited Cancer Hospital #62 just outside of Moscow. It was a hard visit. Dad had survived cancer only a few years earlier, and the visit brought back painful memories. A cancer hospital was the last place he wanted to be.

It was the leading cancer hospital in Russia at the time. But even the top doctors could not make up for the lack of resources, medicine, and supplies. People were sent here to die.

The hospital was surviving on almost nothing. The medicine cabinets were empty, there were no bandages for wounds, and plastic straws were being used for tracheotomies. In fact, each night, two people washed rubber latex gloves so they could be reused the next day. (Yes, that's what I said—*reused!*)

The chief surgeon was a man named Dr. Mahkson. He asked us for help, and my dad promised him we would send it as soon as possible—and we did. We were able to ship thirteen ocean-going containers full of supplies valued at over \$2 million!

That was the beginning of our humanitarian aid work at World Help. Thanks to individual supporters, businesses, doctor's offices, companies, hospitals, and grants, hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of vital medical supplies, equipment, food, and other aid have been shipped and distributed around the world impacting millions of people . . . and it continues to grow.

We can't follow
Christ without loving
the people He made
in His image.

But back to the cancer hospital. I was there the week that one of these containers was delivered. I saw doctors literally running out of surgery, ripping open the boxes, and pulling out tubing or some piece of equipment they needed for surgery right at that moment. It was incredible.

Dr. Mahkson came up to me and said, "Young lady, please give your dad a message. Tell him thank you, and tell him that you are the first Americans to ever keep their promise!" Such powerful words.

Many years and shipments later, on one of our last visits to Cancer Hospital #62, Dr. Mahkson told my dad, “At first, I did not believe your faith. But I have seen it in action. I now accept your faith.”

I mean, come on. Is there any greater example of the 1-2 punch? When we love people the way God has loved us, we earn the right to be heard. It’s the combination of the punches that makes it most effective. When you truly love and know God, it’s impossible to keep that love to yourself.

“At first, I did not believe your faith. But I have seen it in action. I now accept your faith.”

We all know the ultimate victory in a boxing match is a knockout. And in our case, the ultimate victory is knocking out the needs around the world. They say you don’t need to be the most powerful puncher to knock someone out. You just need to land an accurate shot in the right place.

And I would add, you don’t have to be the wealthiest person in the room to make a difference. You don’t have to have all the answers to help save a life. You don’t have to travel the globe and look directly into their eyes to feel and see their needs. All you have to do is put your energy behind this one small, strategic move—the 1-2 punch—making sure it lands in the right place.

By meeting the needs of the body and the soul together, we can knock out poverty, hunger, disease, and despair with a 1-2 punch.

With practical training and spiritual resources, we can help knock out slavery and oppression with a 1-2 punch.

With a bicycle, a soccer jersey, and a container of medical supplies, we can help save lives and spread the good news of the gospel far and wide.

“Both” is a 1-2 punch.

ALL THAT IS WHOLE IS HOLY

During my thirty years of humanitarian work, I’ve learned that in order to bring about wholeness in the world, you have to love people wholly. And that is holy work.

One partner wisely shared that, “Hunger has no religion.”

Just think about it. If people don’t have their basic needs met, how can they survive? And if they don’t survive, do any of our other programs really matter? How can our strategies be effective if we can’t even keep people alive?

As author Jamie Erickson points out, “Christ knew that a ‘Go and sin no more’ message would be drowned out by the rumbling of an empty stomach. So, Jesus multiplied fish and loaves. He satisfied physical needs before He met spiritual ones. And in the end, the former almost always paved the way for the latter.”⁸

The truth is, when you feed the body, you feed the soul. And when you feed the soul, hope finally has the space to expand and flourish. And that’s the strategy our partners of over three decades have repeated to us over and over.

⁸ Erickson, Jamie. *Holy Hygge: Creating a Place for People to Gather and the Gospel to Grow*, page 38.

BOTH

I've witnessed it time and time again. When people have what they need to live another day, deeper hungers emerge. The hunger for belonging. The hunger for community. The hunger for God's Word and His ways.

Both hungers matter to God. Both hungers should matter to us.

Living out the meaning of both means embracing the beauty of paradox. And isn't that what faith is all about?

I believe Jesus modeled the "Genius of the AND." Think about it: He was God AND man. He preached faith AND works, truth-telling AND healing, justice AND mercy. Not only that, but He wanted everyone at the table—Jews AND Gentiles, rich AND poor, Pharisees AND prostitutes, children AND kings, friends AND enemies.

I believe the intent of the gospel is found in the AND. Help AND Hope. Always BOTH, and always with eternity in mind.



Scan the QR code for photos, videos, and more details about the stories from around the world shared in this chapter.