



The Heart  
of Wealth  
Spreading God's Joy

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The Heart of Wealth: Spreading God's Joy

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Published by:

Creating Jobs Inc

1702 N. Woodland Blvd. #116437

DeLand FL 32720

World Wide Web: [www.creatingjobs.org](http://www.creatingjobs.org)

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ISBN 978-1-7334519-5-6

Printed in the United States of America

## Chapter 3

### Feasting and Fasting – All at Once!

#### SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

It's not enough to *empty* sins from our hearts; we must *fill* them with what's on God's heart, namely compassion for the lost, the hurting, the orphan, the poor. So, how can I enjoy a beautiful house when my friends in Haiti barely have a roof? Where's the empathy in that? Solidarity is a little-noticed virtue in the godly people of Scripture. Queen Esther risked her position and even her life to advocate for her people, the Jews. Although their solidarity slipped into accusation, Job's three friends made this good start: "When they lifted up their eyes at a distance and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky. Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great" (Job 2:12-13). King David, thirsty on the battlefield, reverently poured out the water three men had risked their lives to bring him. Uriah the Hittite refused to go home to his wife while his comrades were on the battlefield. Even when the people of Jerusalem lacked remorse for their own sin (and its impending judgment), Isaiah and Jeremiah wept on their behalf. Paul made it clear that solidarity with brothers and sisters in other nations was part of following Jesus. Referring to Christians from Jerusalem ("others") and Corinth ("you"), he wrote: "For I do not mean that *others* should be eased and *you* burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need" (1 Corinthians 8:13-14a ESV). Later in the same letter, he wrote: "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Corinthians 12:26 ESV).

#### WHAT DOES GODLY SOLIDARITY ENTAIL?

In this spirit, I *used to* have a conviction that I should not have housing for my car that is better than the housing of my friends in Haiti. I mentioned this in several talks to churches, flashing a slide of a McMansion three-car garage (pictured below) on the screen juxtaposed to a friend's dirt-floored hut in a Haitian village.



Fast forward 15 years and I'm soon to have a garage much bigger and more hurricane-resistant than those huts. Am I a sell-out? Maybe so. God is my judge. I hope the answer is "no" – perhaps because God wants our Haitian friends to *also* enjoy good things that are denied to them by a sinister combination of factors such as: a corrupt political system

that rewards leaders at the expense of the people their supposed to be serving, lack of infrastructure and jobs, minimal access to affordable business loans, dearth of business training (which Creating Jobs Inc offers), high cost of materials due to a low-trust culture and high island shipping costs, natural disasters, absence of the rule of law, poor medical care, food insecurity, rampant illiteracy, corrupt police, a fatalistic mindset, Voodoo, and aid that creates dependency and undercuts dignified work. Another hole in my approach was the use of shame for having material things that are part of the good creation of a good God. Consider Martin Luther's positive view: "If silver and gold are things evil in themselves, then those who keep away from them deserve to be praised. But if they are good creations of God, which we can use both for the needs of our neighbor and for the glory of God, is not a person silly, yes, even unthankful to God, if he refrains from them as though they were evil?" (Lectures on Genesis).

## MAKING SENSE OF VAST DISPARITIES

One of the most striking contrasts I've experienced in our work in developing countries is what I see out my American Airlines window at the beginning and end of flights between Port-au-Prince and Miami. Just after takeoff, I gape through my porthole at plumes of smoke from smoldering trash in the unpaved streets of a massive slum. Cité Soleil is considered one of the poorest and most dangerous neighborhoods in the Western Hemisphere, devoid of both police patrols and sewer systems. It is home to 400,000 desperate yet courageous people whose combined multitude of makeshift homes are worth less than the jet overhead which swiftly ascends to an altitude where harsh realities blur into vague generalities. Cuba is next to drift beneath me – a seeming prosperous, pastoral scene from 10,000 feet. Then in short order: the Keys and Miami up close. Unlike the tree-less monochrome of Cité Soleil, I'm greeted by a succulent paradise. Thousands of pricy Royal palms and Dr. Seuss-like Norfolk Island pines pierce the sky and dance in the ocean breeze amidst mile after mile of masterpiece homes. What should we make of such a striking contrast seen from the same seat in a couple of hours' time? Should it be gratitude for living in this country (the most common sentiment from short-term missionaries) or should we judgmentally comment on Haiti's perennial inability to establish stability and prosperity? I chose neither. For years, my response was to judge the decadence of Miami's consumerism: "all those rich people with no heart for the suffering just a few islands away."

And now? I still feel bound to practice the solidarity taught in bible verses such as Hebrews 13:3: "Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." And I still believe many Americans depend on their wealth instead of God – idolatry which



will not escape his judgment. But the abundance isn't the problem; it's the sinful human heart. In fact, the prosperity signals that much as gone right, such as a stable government that (however imperfect) is accountable to its people, a stable economy where property rights are respected and contracts are enforced, market systems wherein suppliers/vendors/contractors are rewarded for being trustworthy, strong infrastructure (roads, communications, power), an efficient banking system, availability of a dizzying array of goods and services at market prices, substantial



freedom to choose one's own path in education and work and housing, and career/business opportunities which reward workers in proportion to the value they provide. (I cannot share a stereotype-affirming negative snapshot of Haiti without the qualifier that Haiti boasts countless resilient people and gorgeous places - like dazzling Kokoye Beach – see below.) Ironically, despite the constant threats to their mere survival, several Haitian friends have exemplified heartfelt empathy – for me. When learning that Karen and I were not able to have children (which actually enabled me to pour much of my life into impacting places like Haiti), they would say how sorry they are for us and promise to pray for us to bear children.

## **SOLIDARITY = EMPATHY + ACTION**

The solidarity that Scripture calls us to practice with the global Body of Christ is less about feeling guilt and more about leveraging our intellectual and financial capital to help co-create new opportunities with our brothers and sisters. We welcome you to do this with us at Creating Jobs Inc!



Perhaps COVID-19 has grown our empathy for the level of vulnerabilities that the developing-world poor live with day in and day out – pandemic or no pandemic – and without even the dream of a \$2 trillion government bailout! “A report from the International Rescue Committee looks at what it calls a “double emergency” in the world’s most vulnerable countries, where the virus is now beginning to spread. The virus, they say, will cause both a health and a humanitarian crisis” (The Corona Virus is a Ticking Bomb for the

World's Displaced People, 2020). So, now more than ever the developing world and the inner-city need an infusion of the hope and dignity that come with creating economic opportunities that help their families to thrive. When we “mourn with those who mourn” enough to add our practical business know-how to their determination, a joyful partnership is born in which to “rejoice with those who rejoice”! But are we willing to step into their shoes, which may involve germy airports, struggles to digest new foods and languages, and even dangerous diseases and neighborhoods? Does Jesus expect this of us?

## THE JESUS APPROACH TO SUFFERING



An acute danger of wealth is a distorted posture toward pain, such as: “avoid it like the plague” or “I’m above that” or “I’ll buy my way out of suffering.” That’s delusional! Do we Americans value anything more than safety? (No wonder COVID-19 has brought us fear as well as precaution.) There’s no escaping hardship, but we can lean on Jesus who endures it with us. A storm is either present or on its way to every life near you, but we’re not alone. Enter a “furious squall” into the lives of the sea-seasoned fisherman who followed Jesus. Though fast asleep and possibly snoring along with the

howling wind he was somehow still controlling, Jesus expected his disciples to take courage in his very presence during the storm. They did not (Mark 4:35-41). We just don’t want storms – even if Jesus is right here the whole time. Assuming I’ll pick this up to read years after moving into our home (if God wants us to keep it that long), let me remind my future self that material comforts are short-lived and do not exempt me from all sorts of pain that God may allow into my life for his glory and my good. Listen here, self: “Don’t buy the delusion that a nice house exempts you from hardship or heartache. Look at Pharaohs’ palace on Passover night. Or consider the Kobe Bryant mansion on January 26, 2020.” So, let’s take a quick tour of the Bible’s thoughts on hardship in the lives of the faithful.

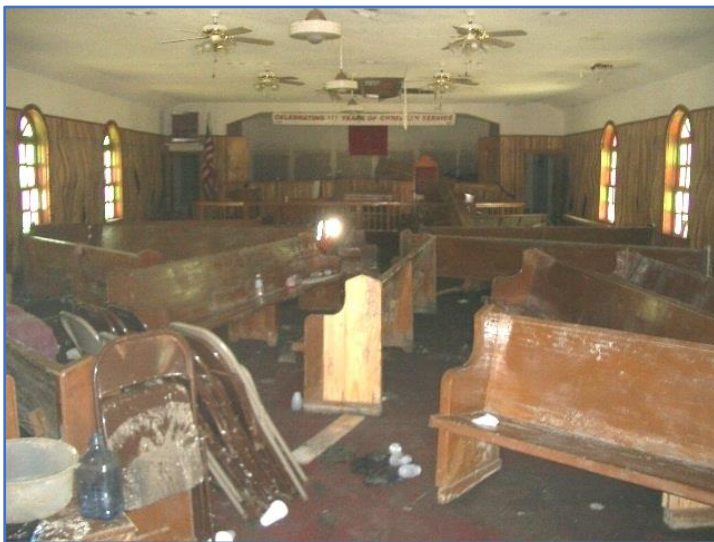
## WHY DO WE SUFFER?

The blessed obligation to enjoy God’s creation (which we pondered above) begs the question: should we join the prosperity gossips in accusing folk of lacking faith or favor if they are suffering? No way! Look at all the godly people who suffered in Scripture – starting with God-in-flesh who said to his disciples’ dismay: “In this world, you will have trouble” (John 16:33). We share in the general affliction of a fallen world, reap the

consequences of our own sin, are disciplined by God “for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness” (Hebrews 3:10), and suffer for reasons we may never understand (as did Job and others to whom God never reveals the full purpose of their pain). The facts that we’re stuck with it (but not forever!) and that God can bring good out of it doesn’t make suffering a good thing that we should seek out (not that you would!). Unless your boulder-top tent is facing a blow-your-mind view of a mountain lake, sleeping on a rock instead of a mattress would make you “a few clowns short of a circus”!

## SUFFERING IS EVIL, BUT BEARING IT FOR OTHERS IS GOOD

Pain ain’t pious! No; it’s a curse – starting in Genesis 3 – with pain in our births, thorns in our fields, and death in our futures. A shameful death was considered a great curse: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13). By willingly taking our curse upon himself, our gracious Lord reveals that suffering for others is redemptive. Likewise, our embracing of heartache for the sake of love is Christlike. Don’t hear me overstating this, however. Only Christ’s suffering saves, but our solidarity comforts and helps others experience the love of Christ. Hurricane Katrina survivors were comforted merely by other humans stopping long enough to listen to their harrowing stories, such as the Bennetts cramming 27 family members into their attic which felt increasingly like a trap as the flood waters nearly reached the ceiling before cresting. Or stories of folks who climbed trees to escape a speedily rushing and rising storm surge – only to be stranded and shivering all night long, clinging awkwardly to limbs shared with snakes and alligators! And being shown the muddy interior of the 111-year-old Greater Mt. Zion AME Church (pictured below) in Pearlington, Mississippi which became a watery tomb for some fellow members who were trapped by the sudden flood.



One elderly gentleman with shaky health broke into tears in his FEMA trailer after we completed thousands of dollars’ worth of dangerous tree work at no cost. He said: “I feel like God was in my backyard today.” Likewise, I was discovering a uniquely soul-satisfying intimacy with God whenever I served the poor. The local church who connected us with this man later told us that our presence and generosity led to him coming to faith in Jesus Christ!

## RUN *FROM* OR *TO* SUFFERING?

In a world so ravished by natural disasters, sin, and now the Coronavirus, should we avoid a challenge whenever possible? No. No muscle nor business nor cathedral was built without it. In fact, Paul shocks Timothy with this: “Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:3). What?! Another version says: “Take your share of suffering...” He was only echoing Christ’s “take up [your] cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Karen Jobes continues this unwelcome, offensive thought: “For one cannot step into the footsteps of Jesus and head off in any direction than the direction he took, and his footsteps lead to the cross, through the grave, and onward to glory” as quoted by Jason Hood (Hood, 2013). Even money cannot shield us from all discomfort, but it does tempt us to isolate and insulate ourselves from suffering – and more disobediently – from sufferers. On the contrary, we must follow Jesus who willingly entered the heartache of others. He “took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). Instead of flippantly raising Lazarus as a quick trick, he stopped to feel the weight of the ruthless destruction that death wreaks on our world. He wept in sorrow and indignation (John 11:35). We are called to “extend the love of the crucified and risen Savior by entering into the poverty, pain, illness, and isolation of others” (Kapic, *The God Who Gives*, p. 252).

## SACRIFICIAL GIVING

Our financial gifts can alleviate some hardship and poverty, and when we “give till it hurts,” we experience what we might call “empathetic generosity.” I felt convicted to give more upon reading the non-Christian philosopher Peter Singer. In his book, *The Life You Can Save*, he argues persuasively that we have a moral obligation to help the “15,000 children who die every day, mostly from preventable causes and treatable diseases” (p.196). He goes on to reveal that the J. Paul Getty Museum paid a sum in excess of \$65 million for an Edouard Manet painting....But if it only costs Seva...\$50 to perform a cataract operation in low-income countries, that means there are 1,3000,000 people who can’t see anything at all, let alone a painting, whose sight could have been restored by the sum paid for that painting” (p.196). Although I don’t like the guilt tripping and know that art reflects God’s beauty and creativity, his compelling connection exposes the purchase as an excessive waste in light of the perilous struggle of 736 million people (as of 2019) who are trapped in extreme poverty (less than \$1.90/day). In another hard-hitting comparison, Singer tells of Zell Kravinsky who donated a kidney to save a life and encourages others to do so: “the chances of dying as a result of donating a kidney are about 1 in 4,000, and that to withhold a kidney from someone who would otherwise die means that you value your own life four thousand times more highly than that of a stranger, a ratio that he describes as ‘obscene’” (Singer, *The Life You Can Save*). Both comparisons are challenging to those of us accountable to the demanding standard to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). My Creating Jobs Inc colleagues and I have dedicated our lives to helping the developing-world poor create their own opportunities, but should we be giving more to alleviate the immediate hardship? How do we balance investing in long-term versus short-term solutions?





## DOES GENEROSITY PRECLUDE CELEBRATION?

How can we feast while millions are forced to fast? Is it right for us to have nice things when many still lack the basics to survive? How does the Bible address these tough questions? Well, the Old Testament explains that: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep,

and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4). So, we see that both extremes on the mourning to dancing continuum have their rightful place in lives that please God.

## CHRIST’S FEASTING AMIDST SUFFERING

The New Testament reveals that God-in-flesh lived in the same broken world that we do – and didn’t fix it all! In the first century (and most centuries thereafter), almost all (roughly 90%) of the world’s population lived in grinding poverty. In fact, the most dramatic improvement just happened. In the 25 years between 1990 and 2015, extreme poverty dropped from 36% to 10% of the world’s population (Singer p.11)! Yes, Jesus healed many who suffered; but he didn’t heal them all. He may have provided the dignity and sustenance of a job for a few in his carpentry/stone masonry business, but he didn’t jumpstart the industrial revolution 17 centuries early. Why not? Even more puzzling, in a world where daily food insecurity was the norm, Jesus did plenty of feasting – enough to be called a “glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 7:34). And when a flask of perfume that was worth a year’s wages was poured on him by a sinful woman, he rejected the objection of Judas Iscariot that it should have been sold to benefit the poor (John 12:15). Interesting.

## JESUS WAS OFTEN “MOVED WITH COMPASSION”

Predicted to be “a man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3), Jesus also lived on the other end of the spectrum. “Jesus wept” (John 11:35), sweat “like drops of blood” (Luke 22:44), mourned over rebellious Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37), touched an untouchable leper (Matthew 8:3), submitted to Rome’s most degrading and torturous form of execution, and took the sin of the world upon himself. Bottom line: Jesus embodied both. He showed us how to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).

## A CHALLENGING EXAMPLE OF BALANCE

We may feel schizophrenic when we try to enter the world's pain while simultaneously enjoying God's creation. One way that Jesus envisioned the two extremes fitting together was instructing us to invite the poor to our dinner parties! If you don't know any poor people, how can you invite them into your home for dinner? You can't. Jesus expects us to go to them (in the "highways and byways" – Luke 14:23) and build relationships (since cultural barriers preclude them from coming to us). Intentionally entering into their poverty is the Jesus way. He entered our world; we enter other's by listening to their sorrows and experiencing it with them as I tried to do on the four Katrina relief trips I mentioned earlier. You'll be surprised by the joy that the poor have in God, and you'll learn from how they draw strength from the Lord. As you "take your share of suffering" (2 Timothy 2:3), you will find there's no greater fulfillment than sharing God's love for the poor. The joy of intimacy with Jesus that flooded me on those Katrina relief trips solidified my life's calling to empower the poor. I found myself closer than ever to Jesus, who "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). See, the two ends of the feasting-fasting spectrum really do belong together!

## NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

How involved with the hurting are we called to be? Is donating enough? For some, writing a check may be akin to checking a box. It's important but can also be an easy way out of entanglement in the messy lives of the poor – a means of keeping our distance. Bodily distance. (Or "social distancing" in our new world of COVID-19.) Instead, we truly follow Jesus when we touch a leper. As I write, the world is freaking out while the Coronavirus spreads. Wouldn't Jesus board the quarantined cruise ship to touch the untouchables? Many of his early Roman followers stayed behind to care for the stricken while most fled Rome to escape infection. Bishop Dionysius described how Christians, "Heedless of danger ... took charge of the sick, attending to their every need" (Christianity-Epidemics-2000-Years-Should-I Still Go to Church-Coronavirus, 2020). Their ministry of presence embodied Christ like their money wouldn't.

## SHARING IN SUFFERING

The closest I got to this was visiting – perhaps unwisely – a hospitalized friend afflicted with Tuberculosis. This was in Haiti – a risky place given its frequent unrest, air pollution, and hordes of Mack trucks careening down the middle of narrow roads at breakneck speeds. On a different business mentoring trip to Haiti – which was nearly cancelled at the peak of the Chikungunya virus outbreak – I had lasted all week without a known mosquito bite. Sitting in the courtyard of the Arawak Hotel in Leogane, I was boasting of my good fortune of dodging Chikungunya, when – at that very moment – a mosquito injected its evil needle into the none-too-shy vein in my right forearm. A swift slap from my left hand smeared my own blood. Laughter mixed with dread – for good reason. Sure enough, after a few days of incubation, the achy flu-like symptoms commenced. Thankfully mine was a mild, two-week case. My colleague was not as fortunate, suffering worse symptoms for several months. I did sense that such solidarity – however unwilling – was vaguely good for my soul, giving me a tiny taste of risks that my brothers and sisters in the developing world face 24-7. Shortly after the 2010 Haiti earthquake, Kent Annan wrote: "The gospel does not just rescue us *from* spiritual struggle. It also invites us *into*

struggle alongside others” (Annan, 2010). But how? However God requires. We must be ready to give our all: talent, treasure, and time (which I’m most tempted to hoard) to bless those in need.



## ENTERING HONDURAN STRUGGLES

Our Creating Jobs Inc business mentoring program expanded my naturally anemic empathy towards my global neighbors. Out of sight, out of mind – and heart. But love shows up in person. Only Jesus did this completely, yet baby steps in his path opened my eyes to the daily stresses that Honduran brothers and sisters bear up under: fear of gang extortion cripples everything, the government may raise the sales tax by 3% without warning, and political corruption steadily drains the public trust like a wound drips blood. Yet

even in this stifling atmosphere, there are courageous people who dare to build a better future for their families. I’d like you to meet two of them: Carlos and Leidy, both members of the Church of God whom we met through a microfinance institution named Proyecto Aldea Global.

## GENTLE & KIND CARLOS

Carlos is secure but not arrogant, muscular but not intimidating. His steady gaze with smiling eyes makes you as comfortable with yourself as he is with himself. His kind manner with his machine shop employees embodies Christ’s “wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove.” He’s the kind of boss you don’t want to disappoint, but not out of fear. He exudes quiet warmth. With thick eyebrows, an easy smile, and a little extra weight, he is like a dad you want to hug.

During our last visit, he was sharing how he’d finally finished building a new home for his wife (Giselle) and two children (Roberto and Abigail). Giselle, a high school physics teacher, has helped Carlos improve his designs according to the laws of physics. She has been working on her master’s degree as a step towards becoming a professor at a college which would grant free tuition to her children.





*1 Carlos (far left) on his very first business visit as a local mentor.*

Carlos was working on several contracts to expand his machine shop, including armoring cars for individuals and the police. His gift for business and receptivity to observations from Creating Jobs mentors led to developing him as a “local mentor” who joined us in coaching three other Tegucigalpa entrepreneurs. What a great fit! He didn’t say much in those mentoring sessions, but what he did say was impactful, offering a helpful connection, a relevant snippet of his own experience, or a word of reassurance.

Feeling so blessed by his friendship and teamwork, we were rocked to the core by this March 2, 2018 (raw and abrupt) three-sentence email from our partner organization in Honduras: “Unfortunately, I must inform you that Carlos Almendares died yesterday. It seems that he died at work, a heavy machine fell on his head. I'm sorry for this loss.” Disbelief. The words made no sense. What an unspeakable loss for Giselle, for Roberto, for Abigail. While our donation helped with his funeral, the solidarity that buoyed them most came from local church members who wept with them daily and provided practical care. Being connected to the higher rate of early death in the developing world (due to factors including inadequacies in safety, nutrition, sanitation, and medicine) has grown my capacity for empathy, given me a more sober outlook on life, and puts into perspective my own “first-world problems.”



When the global church supports each other, it reminds suffering believers that they are not alone, not forgotten.

## RESILIENT & COURAGEOUS LEIDY

Leidy Anariba is a striking mestizo beauty in her late twenties whose face combines Spanish refinement with Amerindian resilience and comes to life with a gleaming smile - curiously warm but nervous and quickly receding into solemnity. Feeling insecure about her limited education, her eyes drop away from ours after connecting ever so briefly. She's confident in her intuitive talent for making purses (*carteras*) and shoes (*zapatos*) that fit the budgets and tastes of low-income Hondurans, but she feels unworthy of being mentored by gringo entrepreneurs who live worlds apart from the makeshift room where she works and tries to sleep in the *colonia* (neighborhood) of Las Torres which has helped Tegucigalpa earn its reputation as the murder capital of the world.



In fact, that infamy had violated her home and crippled her spirit on July 11, 2014, when her 32-year-old brother Oscar was gunned down at dusk by *las maras* (gangs) while trying to make his way home from work. His presence lingers in a memorial on her wall (see below) and in a sadness that tempers the smile in her sober eyes. She wants to embrace the joy of life, but heartache has stunted her hope. We helped Leidy think through ways to memorialize Oscar, then she sobbed as we read to her of the coming day when "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" (Revelation 21:4-5).

A month after Oscar's murder, Leidy was able to pull together enough strands of her shattered psyche to restart her business. Over time she regained her bearings and rebuilt her customer base and production volume (an astounding 90 purses and 12 pairs of shoes *per day!*). In late 2014, she was training her younger (26-year-old) brother Marvin (pictured with Leidy below) to become their main shoemaker. During our January 2015 mentoring session, we were trying to get the even-quieter-than-Leidy Marvin to open up about his life and craft. The pry-bar that finally released his enthusiasm was a query about his future plans. Relieved that his hope for the future had not been completely suffocated by Oscar's murder, we saw the wide and familiar Anariba grin emerge as he laid out his plans to eventually open his very own shoemaking business, an idea fully endorsed by his proud big sister!



After learning that shoes were their most profitable product (with 48% profit margin), they took our advice and began training another employee, Daniel, to help increase their production of shoes. While they had been considering adding pants (*pantalones*) and blouses (*blusas*) as new product lines, they followed our suggestion to forego this since they had even lower margins than purses. This allowed them to focus their capital and labor on the shoes which were walking down the street as fast as they could assemble them. As we wrapped up our two-hour session, we said “hasta la vista,” not knowing it was to be the last conversation we’d share on this earth.



A couple of months later, on April 15, 2020, *las maras* struck again without warning and with devastating force. At 2:40AM, three gang members snuck into their home workshop and emptied their automatic weapons into the sleeping form of Marvin Rene Anariba Manzanares. He died instantly as did his 19-year-old wife Evelyn Iveth Cruz Dubon, who had studied sewing in a trade school and had helped make the purses. There was no dispute, only gunfire, in the very room we had offered business mentoring on our quarterly visits.

In the midst of her unspeakable grief and disbelief, Leidy was required to identify the bodies to the authorities. As futile yet reflexive as running from a tsunami or a pyroclastic flow, Leidy tried to distance herself from the brutal murders of her older and younger brothers by fleeing her home, her colonia, her city – for good. Such pain only Jesus knows and bears with her. (Stories like this reveal the level of desperation which pushes Hondurans into life-threatening migrations northward.)



## RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST

If I hadn't known Leidy, the death of her brothers would have been just another quickly forgotten headline from the developing world where life comes cheaper, and death comes quicker. But when I read the El Heraldo news article (Sucesos, 2020), the photo showed forensic officers bearing a body bag heavy with broken dreams and Satanic brutality.

As you can see (above), the image hauntingly reveals the outlines of Marvin's frame resting in a spot on the very balcony where I had stood a couple of months before. They were dragging his stiff remains from the room where I had snapped perhaps the last-ever *living* photograph of his too-young-to-die face. Marvin. Evelyn. Oscar. They were robbed of their lifeblood for no reason other than a gang's desire to maintain control of a *colonia* through terror. What kept this from being another quickly forgotten news headline for me? To state the painfully obvious: I knew the man in the bag.

When we know the poor, their problems become more real. We start to care. They're no longer a stat or a stereotype but a fellow human, a neighbor we're called to love. And that sense of connection is an important need since isolation is a defining element of poverty. So, on top of the physical hardships, the real backbreakers of poverty are psychological and social.

So, if you want to help the poor – do more than send your money – get to know them personally. What it will cost you in pain will be made up for by a growing likeness to Jesus who “took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). It's the glory of humility, of crucifixion. By sharing in sorrow (of Christ and his people), we share in glory. The importance of our presence in the lives of Leidy and Marvin, Carlos and Giselle is not in our individual identities but as representatives of the global church because “in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5). “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). You too can now join in caring about and praying for these other members of Christ's one body. And it's far from a one-way relationship; we desperately need *them* in many ways, including their stellar examples of habits commended in this book: dependence on God, generous hospitality, and unshakeable gratitude.

## EMPATHY CLOSER TO HOME

While I'm quick to invite you to join our mission to “co-create thriving businesses and communities” in some of the world's most vulnerable places, I realize that entering the struggles of others is also a daily calling that is much closer to home. For me, I sometimes allow my focus on alleviating global suffering to limit my empathetic presence with my chronically ill wife. That's not right! Karen is my covenant partner, the neighbor I'm most called to love. I need to dial in to her suffering, including empathy with daily reports (since 1999) of fatigue, pain, and grief over lost capacities. This is a daily opportunity to shape my heart like Christ's. Whose heartaches are you called to enter?

## LIVING IN PARADOX

Following Christ's footsteps requires entering fully into both joy and heartache, feasting and fasting, praising and lamenting. Like Jesus who wept over – then reversed – Lazarus' death, we are to feel the world's brokenness in our very bowels while rejoicing in the ways the King is already making things whole. It's no easy task holding together this cosmic sorrow and joy as a community of faith: rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. Better yet, we are to look for joy *amidst* suffering as we strain to glimpse (and participate in) the Father's redemptive purpose – like Jesus in Gethsemane: “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Holding joy and sorrow together seems to us like mixing fire and ice or sushi and chili dogs or skinny jeans and cowboy boots. We can learn how to live with this tension from the African American church. With its roots in Negro spirituals sung by enslaved Africans in the South's sweltering cotton fields, Gospel music celebrates future hope while grieving present oppression. And, of course, the Book of Psalms has for nearly 3,000 years given voice to humanity's brightest praises and darkest griefs. We definitely need Jesus to show us how lament and joy can be twins (fraternal, not identical!). By his Spirit, we can embrace both the feasts and the funerals that God places before us.

## IS IT SPIRITUAL TO BE POOR – OR RICH?

Pastor Tom Nelson warns against two common distortions of the Bible's teaching on possessions: the poverty “gospel” and the prosperity “gospel” – each attaching spiritual virtue to either the absence or presence of wealth. He says that “According to Dallas Willard, “The idealization of poverty is one of the most dangerous illusions of Christians in the contemporary world. Stewardship which requires possessions and includes giving is the true spiritual discipline in relation to wealth” (Willard, 2020). Nelson concludes that “material impoverishment is no more intrinsically spiritual than material abundance. In all economic circumstances, whether they are bleak or bright, faithful and fruitful stewardship of all God entrusts to us is required” (Nelson, *The Economics of Neighborly Love*, p. 36). While God's creation is good and therefore part of God's overall blessings bestowed upon humanity, having much doesn't signal God's special favor on certain individuals or societies. In fact, Jesus says this while teaching his followers to be like God who loves his enemies: “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45).

And there are millions in the global Church who have less than I but are no less loved by God or “walking in his favor.” Thriving financially is often a natural result of hard work and integrity, but these effects are often negated by the lack of property rights, enforcement of contracts, and infrastructure. It is even harder to create wealth in an environment of excessive bureaucracy and corruption or violence – from governments or gangs. So, prosperity or lack thereof, isn't a reflection of your faith. Our righteousness comes from Christ alone, by faith alone, through grace alone. All is of grace, including the common grace through which God provides for all of humanity.



Temptations are found in possessions and in the lack thereof. Maybe that's why Agur asks God in Proverbs 30:8-9 to:

“give me neither poverty nor riches,  
but give me only my daily bread.

Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you  
and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’

Or I may become poor and steal,  
and so dishonor the name of my God.”

Money or no money, you are called to “cast your burden upon the Lord” (Psalm 55:22), look for him to deliver and sustain you, and “spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry” (Isaiah 58:10).

So we've seen that strong faith is found among both poor and rich. Wealth does not necessarily signal God's favor, nor does poverty prove his disfavor. Poverty does not make us holy, but sharing in the suffering of others is an important way to follow Jesus. He willingly entered into the pain of others, both weeping with them and wiping their tears through healings previewed his coming Kingdom. We too must learn to simultaneously lament and rejoice with other members of his body. Developing world and inner-city believers are one with us in Christ, and so solidarity with them is not optional. We must share together in both feasts and funerals, for “in Christ we, though many, form *one* body, and each member belongs to *all* the others” (Romans 12:5).

## Discussion Questions

- (1) Which example of solidarity in scripture speaks to you most and why?
- (2) Why is feeling shame for having material possessions not part of biblical solidarity with the poor?
- (3) What does Keller mean by the “Jesus approach to suffering”? (Spending time with the poor to empathize with their struggles. Following Jesus who “took up our infirmities and carried our sorrow” Isaiah 53:4.)
- (4) When have you experienced what Keller describes as “a uniquely soul-satisfying intimacy with God whenever I serve the poor.” (Have a few share a quick memory.)
- (5) Why is it important to follow Jesus’s example of embracing both celebration and sorrow?
- (6) Reflecting on the stories of Carlos and Leidy. Why should we let our hearts break alongside the poor?
- (7) Read all 3 paragraphs of page 67. How does developing real face-to-face relationships with the poor shape our hearts?
- (8) Keller claims that “both the poor and the non-poor experience God’s love in richer ways when they know each other.” What are some of those “richer ways”?