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### Heart for the Poor

In Matthew 21, verse 28, Jesus tells a story. It is a story of 2 sons. Their father goes to the first son and says, "Go, work in my vineyard." And the son says "No, I don't want to work today." But later he changes his mind and he goes. Then the father goes to the second son and asks him the same thing "Son, go, work in my vineyard." The second son says "Of course Father. I'll get my things and go", but this son does not go.

"Which of the 2 did what his father wanted?" Of course, it was the first son.

One of the things that has always plagued me about being a Christian is how many non-Christians come & say: How can you believe in God when there is so much poverty & suffering in the world?

To which I always feel: When there is so much suffering & poverty in the world, how can you **not**?

Since living in India, I have felt even more strongly about this.

In Kolkata, we would walk out of the door and there would be poverty everywhere. There is no escaping it.

There are guys washing in the street, people dressed in nothing but dirt, and kids played naked in the road.

I can remember going outside in the first week and seeing children crying on the street. It was so commonplace, nobody even battered an eyelid. There was little, or no, hope for these people. They, quite literally, have nothing. One particular incident sticks out in my mind - a pregnant woman sleeping on a doorstep. I can remember how cold she must have been, and I can remember how horrified I was and yet at the same time I was just so overwhelmed by fear. I was afraid to go & do anything, to act. I went back to the Guest House feeling **so** inadequate.

I looked back to times when I was at home, one day a friend came to me and asked me what I was going to be doing in India. At that point I didn't know. What little I did know he already knew. But I told him, "It might sound corny, but I want to change the world. I want to make it a better place. I want to have my hand in the annihilation of poverty worldwide."

This was the mission statement that I had set for myself. I had decided I was going to go out there & I was going to change the world! But I'm not stupid, I knew I couldn't but I still wanted to change *my part* of the world, the part *I* was going into.

I was thinking what a monumental task had set myself.

I found myself in the first week, at church, listening to the Pastor praying about just how much God loves Kolkata. I can remember sitting and thinking, "Nah, mate. You're **so**

**wrong.**" I remember thinking, "It's great that you have such a faith but, from what I can see, God **just doesn't give a stuff!**"

I stand today and I tell you now, at that moment, I was the most ignorant, stupid person in the world. I could not have been more wrong.

One of my favourite songs says, 'Open the eyes of my heart, Lord', I want to see Jesus. Those words are so right for what I should have been saying at that time. I wish I could say to you that, at that moment, God opened my eyes, but it just didn't happen.

I reached a period of time when our work out in India meant nothing to me. I had completely lost my heart for those people. I wanted just to go home!

This was by far my lowest point in India.

But I was lifted, when our host, Anu, took us up to the roof, and from the roof of the Guest House you can see all across Kolkata. You can see the vastness of the skyscrapers, you can see the people on the streets, you can see the dirt, the pollution. I felt like crying. Because, at the time, all I could think of was how little God cared for these people. But the eyes of my heart *were* opened.

Anu pointed out huge areas, buildings, that were going to transform the Guest House, different projects that she wanted to open up. I could see immediately how God was working in her and all over the city. She told us more about how Kolkata was changing, how Christian projects were popping up everywhere. Suddenly, at that moment, I realised what a small piece I play in God's **great** plan. I saw how Kolkata, a den of deprivation, could become a beautiful, towering, **inferno** for God.

I could see how in 10, maybe 20 years time, Kolkata has the potential to be a stronghold for God.

Like the first son in Jesus' parable, I had closed my eyes to God. Just as the first son said 'No.' to *his* father and ignored the work that needed to be done, I had ignored what was in front of my face. It was easier to accept that God was to blame. I was like a child, thinking, '*I* didn't make that mess – I shouldn't have to clear it up!'

We can be a bit like that in our daily lives. It's very easy to see the things that are wrong with the world. It's very easy to see the bad things that happen. Often we forget to accredit the good things in the world to God.

But like the first son, I realised my mistake. I realised that God isn't to blame. And just as there is work to be done in a vineyard, that somebody has to do, there is mercy to be shown to the poor.

I take you back to what I said at the beginning, when I said that it frustrates me when non-Christians ask me 'Where is God when there is suffering in the world?', because I can tell you where God is. God is **with** the poor. It is very easy to see faith and God in the poor of Kolkata. Materially these people have nothing but spiritually they have so much.

God is out there, He's on the front line. He is fixing it and He is calling *you* to play your part in that. God challenges us every day to step out in faith - be it to our next-door neighbour,

our colleagues at work, or jumping on a plane to India and getting stuck in with the street children. Jesus tells us in Matthew 25:40, "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

If there was one thing that I could pray for today, it would be that the world would open their hearts and their eyes, that we would all shed the things that shield us from the work and the calling of God.

Jesus said, 'Go and make disciples of all nations'. 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.'

The undeniable fact is, that the Bible calls us to share the Good News, calls us to have a heart for those who are struggling through this world, who are less fortunate than us. Though you may not be called to go out on an Action Team, we are all called to be God's people.

Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord,"