

Proceeding into Justice for the Poor

By: Mark Klink

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Speaker 1: So, we're here to talk about the issue of justice for the poor. And I want to tell you a story that I recently read about. There was an article in the Memphis, Tennessee daily newspaper, a front-page article about a suburban church who went into the inner city and did a day long outreach, basically door to door evangelism. And the article talked about the incredible impact that this church had that day in the inner city. And the church pastors are just kind of patting themselves on the back. We've done a great thing in the inner city today. And they had some great quotes from some of the people in the inner city that talked to the reporter, said, yeah, it's great that they came in here and shared the gospel with us. And there were three men from the suburbs who were working with an inner-city ministry in Memphis that had spent years in the inner city working among the people, getting to know them, building relationships, trying to help them pull themselves up out of poverty. And a couple of these men were just dejected at this article and like, this isn't fair.

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Here this church comes in for one day and look at what these people are saying about the impact the church had. We've been here for years toiling among the poor, and they don't say these things about our ministry. That's not fair. They were envious. And then the third guy that works in them came in shortly after, and they were all jovial. And the other two guys looking at him like, didn't you see this newspaper article? He's like, yeah, it was great. And they're like, what are you talking about? And he said, let me tell you, because what these inner-city residents say to the

reporters is very different from what they say when they go in their house and go behind closed doors. When they go in and close their doors, they're making fun of these suburban people who've come in for the day. And he said, it's really the reality is the exact opposite of what this newspaper article said because the view that these inner-city people have, here come these white people from the suburbs, and they're coming in here for a day, and then they're going back to their nice little lives and their wealthy homes.

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They don't know us. They can't relate to us. Who are they to come in one day a year and tell us we've got to listen to this message that they're bringing us? And the story went on to say what these people in the inner city were looking for was respect and relationship, rather than us coming in one day a year, going on a blitz from door to door and not even taking time to listen to their stories. And it was very convicting to me. I think that illustrates well, what we're going to talk about in this session is the idea that ministry is much more than words. That ministry is also about bringing justice to people's lives.

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Mark: So just to kind of start off here, we want to hear from you. As he said, I'm former Biola student, so I know people here have some sort of concept of what justice is, and we're talking about justice to the poor. So, I want to hear some feedback from you just so we can kind of get on the same page here. As we're talking to you today, like, what do you see justice as? What is justice to you? Raise your hand. Give me some feedback for those of you who didn't hear, correct me if I'm wrong. You're saying, like, a self-awareness of that we're blessed and just an

idea of, okay, noticing that we are blessed and to give back to other people. Somebody else.
Okay, not showing partiality yeah.

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Speaker 3: For me, justice would be sort of like putting someone in an equalization so if you were wrong, the other person would be wronged in the same way. Or if you wronged somebody, the same equal thing would happen to you, like, no more, no less.

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Mark: Awesome. Somebody else. What does justice look like to you? What is your definition of justice? She said, right relationship with others, right relationship with God. This kind of just idea of being in the way it should be in relationships.

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Speaker 1: Those are all really good thoughts. I want to share with you a definition I heard recently from a professor at Wheaton College that really struck me, and I think it encompasses all of what you guys have said. But he defined justice as people having the ability, people having the resources, rather to live whole lives. People having the resources to live whole or complete lives.

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Mark: Yeah. And I think that's incredibly key to the issue, especially if we look at, okay, what is this issue of poverty? Somebody defined it once. One of my instructors defined poverty as issue

of not having choices. It's not just an issue of economics. It's not just an issue of maybe spiritual poverty. It includes everything, not having the ability to make choices. And so, this idea of what does justice to the poor, what does that entail? Making sure people have the resources to live whole lives, to have, like, as Bethany said, to have right relationships with God, with creation, with each other and whatnot.

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And we wanted to extend one more question to you. What does this look like? We're talking about just as the poor. We're saying, okay, right relationships with God and man. We're saying, okay, it's not just economic, it's an issue of choices, but what does that look like? And do you have any stories, examples that you can give that can kind of tease out some of these ideas to kind of give a picture to everyone in the room from your standpoint of, like, okay, here's justice in action. So, I would just like to hear some examples from you. Did you all hear that?

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Okay, the question I'm asking is not so much a question. Just give some insight on your own. Have you been somewhere, interact with something? And this is kind of a picture of justice to the poor. Like, what does it mean to bring people into a point where they have the resources to live whole lives? Because I think that somewhat in our minds, it's very kind of hazy. What does that look like?

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Speaker 1: And so, the example here was helping someone who's homeless, who is living on the streets come to a point where their needs are being met and they're not living on the streets anymore. Is that inaccurate?

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Speaker 3: You could help a poor person, but helping them wouldn't really be all just, or right? It's just because you could help them get there. But they don't have to work for it. You have to still give them a work ethic within it. For me, I remember when we do things, if we want to help someone, a thing me and my other team used to do or whatever I do, if I want to help someone, they have to do something to get what they want out of it because you don't want people being used to just handouts and stuff. Because that's probably what's wrong with a lot of communities now, is they're too used to getting handouts for free and people taking pity on them and stuff. You have to just make them work just like you've done.

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Mark: Kind of an issue of empowerment, empowering them to do stuff for themselves. Other examples, stories,

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Speaker 4: I think like Habitat for Humanity is a good example of that because they're required to do so much work before they can move into the home, and yet they're getting out of the poverty of renting and not really getting ahead. And so, they get the ownership of a home, but

yet they're required to do so many hours of work and building homes and things like that. So that's an example of one where they have justice.

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Speaker 1: I think partly justice and an example of this would be the fact of loving what is right. And a lot of times when people start to work with this, they'll start to hate those who caused this injustice instead of rather just hating the injustice. And I think a lot of times with what you guys talk about earlier, about how these people in the urban area were mocking the church, and I think that after justice has been done, they won't mock the church so much because they won't have a hatred for those who they perceive as part of the injustice or the enabling or the callousness. I thought there's this ancient Semitic linguist that is talking about the word justice in the Bible. He said in the Bible the idea of justice precluded taking away from poor people. He said, like today, you could think of a bank foreclosing on a widow if she stopped paying her mortgage. But in the Old Testament that would have been inconceivable. That wasn't just even though technically it's just it's not.

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Speaker 5: I think also a big aspect of injustice is taking dignity away from somebody or the lack of dignity that a person has shows the level of injustice. And so, I think a key aspect that we've forgotten a lot of the time in feeding the hungry or in helping a community is bringing the dignity back. And there's a lot of facets of that as far as like, well, orphans evades. We're going to give them food and shelter, but are we giving them psychological counseling and everything to get through the things that they've seen so they can be just healthy members of society? And I

think counseling in general with ex prostitutes and stuff like that, just enabling them to see themselves as dignified human beings and not just physically taken care of.

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Mark: These are all great examples. Any others?

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Speaker 6: Kind of flowing off of that? I work with adults with developmental disabilities, and I mean, their physical needs are all met. They receive a monthly check from the government, and they live in nice homes and stuff. But overall, they're very marginalized people, group and people look down on them, they're uncomfortable being around them. It's just kind of an overall difficult life for them. And so, a huge part of seeing justice in their lives is seeing that they're treated with respect and seeing that they receive the dignity that they deserve in their relationships with other people. That they have relationships with other people is a huge part of seeing justice in their lives.

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Speaker 7: I think that people need to identify the skills and gifts that God has given them so that they can integrate these skills into vocations of the society. And part of the way that some Christians group a bunch of poor people together and just giving them easy ways to get money without integrating the unique skills that we all have into finding jobs for these people so that they can eventually support themselves.

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Speaker 8: Like a talk show host or something. Well, there was this mall a while ago that I heard about in the inner city, and they would take people that were on the streets, and they would actually teach them a trade like whether it was computers or even like I think there was even like beauty shop stuff. But also, they would give them confidence courses to tell them that they were worth something, that they could do something for society. Then they would change their appearance or give them a shave and a haircut, that they could go in for job interviews and get stuff or get a job and actually find work. So that was just one aspect of justice that I saw.

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Mark: There's a class I used to, I co taught with another professor here called Interpersonal Inter-cultural Adjustment. And there's this one session we did, and there's probably some of the students that have taken that class in this room. One of the sessions we did was on ideas of social stratification. We did this very basic thing where we kind of split the room off into five groups. And we wanted to do that kind of in this session, but we realized, well, we got Calvary Chapel. It's like a huge venue. There's no way we can do this with that many people.

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So, we split them off into five groups. And the first group is at the front, and they're kind of like the top of the caste system, and they're all facing this direction. Then you have the second, 3rd, fourth, and the last group is in the back. Last group is the bottom rung represents the poorest of the poor and the caste system, the untouchables, they can see everybody else. But the issue was

that the people at the front, when we began to debrief this with the class, you know, the people at the front can't see those behind them.

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They have no recognition of them. The people underneath them are invisible. And it's kind of this notion somebody said earlier, this idea of realizing that we're blessed and then giving that to other people. And it's this notion of like, okay, I get this kind of image of justice to the poor is finally, okay. We are at the top of the strata here in America, and it's an issue of turning around and facing those that are impoverished, those that don't have choices, those that are lacking the resources to live whole lives.

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A story comes to mind. I was in, about two and a half years ago, I guess, in Afghanistan. Julie Douglas is here. She was on the team to Afghanistan. And we got in a couple of cars one day. I got in this hot box, old Soviet jeep, or whatnot. We traveled out of the side of the capital city of Kabul, up north to a little place called Istālif. And we spent the whole day just kind of in this really nasty I mean, the dirt. There's just this huge dirt clods. It's dry as anything. Put one drop of water in there, it just soaks up and disappears and turns to dust again.

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And we were there. Our job was to plant grapevines. We are going to plant grapevines that were donated by vineyard in California. And we were going to create kind of a little system, a small kind of enterprise for some workers that were going to sell these grapes in the city or whatnot.

And it was so cool to be out there because you're in the dirt, you're digging around, you've got this kind of scrawny little Afghan boy who's maybe like 90 pounds, and he's carrying these huge three-to-five-gallon jugs of water across. His arms are shaking and wobbling, and he's carrying his pouring over and then you're putting in the vine and everything like that and just working together and this idea like being there in the dirt, in the mud with these people and kind of just like helping them get a start out on life, helping them sell stuff, have the resources, helping them up, not just handing them something, but working alongside them and coming to recognize them.

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After that, after we had kind of left that day and whatnot, there was a pastor from Texas on the team. He's about 70 years old or so. He just got remarried. His wife had passed away several years ago, got remarried to this woman. This woman, before they got married, said, if you marry me, you got to go to the mission field. And he's just I don't know about that. That's a little too out there. So, their honeymoon was in Afghanistan.

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And he's sitting down and he's coming from this very kind of prejudice background, white, upper middle class. And he's sitting down, and he begins to kind of talk about the day's events and stuff like that with the team and talk about what he's been seeing there. And he starts to just kind of cry and get kind of somber over the whole thing. And he begins telling the story of him as a little boy during the depression and waiting in bread lines and sitting there and just hoping that somebody cared enough that he was poor in order to get bread to sustain him for the day. And then he was starting to draw that and see, like, I no longer see these racial lines. I no longer see

these systems of stratification. I no longer see poor and rich because that little boy in the field was just like me, is exactly like me. And it's this notion of like as I said earlier, he began to see this idea of justice to the poor, seeing myself in their shoes and getting down with them and getting into their story, into their dirt and just living with them in the pain of it all and helping them with their resources and to live whole lives and to reconcile the relationships with God and creation and whatnot. So that's a story I had.

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Speaker 1: So, if we are going to be about justice to the poor, helping bring justice to the poor. And if we're going to look at justice as helping people have the resources to live whole lives, then our response to the poor has got to reflect that wholeness. We call it holism or holistic. And so, it goes beyond seeing people as just souls that need to be saved, which frankly, is how much of our Western church views ministry, isn't it? People are souls that need to be saved. But to see people as whole beings, sure, we are people with souls that need to be saved, but we're also individuals that have physical needs. We're emotional beings. We have emotional needs. We're social beings. We have social needs. Intellectual. So, an effective way of bringing justice to the poor is seeing all of these comprehensive needs of a human being as being linked together. And therefore, our ministry, our response to that is to deal with all of these needs together.

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Let me give you an example of what that looks like. We sent a young missionary, we being Food for the Hungry, to Ethiopia. She was just a little bit older than you all. She graduated from college, maybe it was a year or two out of college, was a nutrition major in college. So, we sent

her to Ethiopia to work alongside our Ethiopian staff. Because vast majority 85% to 90% of Food for the Hungry staff are indigenous workers, are working within their country of birth. So, she was the only white skinned person probably in a 200 miles radius. That has nothing to do with the story, but she was going to do basic health and nutrition training with mothers in the community.

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Because one of the justice issues, one of the injustices in that community, is children are dying at an alarming rate. It's because they lack access to clean water. It's because they lack access to proper nutrition. Mothers don't know how to take care of their infants in terms of making sure they've got nutrients to keep them alive and to keep them healthy. Many, many issues, all of which are so totally solvable, they're so totally preventable. So, she's doing these training workshops with these mothers and just feeling she just wasn't getting through to them. Now, of course, part of that is she's American, they're Ethiopian. There are some obvious cultural issues here.

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But another part of it is she began to know that culture. She discovered another injustice in that region, and that is that it's considered a right given by the gods for husbands to beat their wives. We see that places all over the world. So, women are considered like property, like a dog. I wouldn't beat my dog, but much less my wife. But in their worldview, in their mindset, that's perfectly acceptable. So put yourselves in that woman's shoes and those women in that community you're beaten on a regular basis, that's not only okay, that's right. In the world view

of that community, what degree of motivation do you think you're going to have to improve your life or the life of your children? Someone threw out a number. On a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being no motivation, ten being a great deal of motivation, what do you think your motivation would be? I see a four.

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Yeah, that's pretty much what she found, that maybe it was a one, a two at best. These people lack hope. These women lacked hope. If you lack hope, then you lack motivation to change. Because if you have no hope, then what good is change going to do? So, bringing justice. Let me tell you how justice was brought to bear on both of these issues. The physical issue of the children dying, and the health and the issue of the women being beaten by their husbands.

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Food for the Hungry staff, when they entered this community, they did get to know the people and they did share truth of scripture. They did share Christ. And this one particular man and his woman and his wife sorry, that was not [inaudible 00:22:54] that sounded good. Became Christians, and the Holy Spirit worked in their lives. And the Food for the Hungry staff didn't just give them this message, stay for a day and leave, but they said, we're going to stay here and we're going to disciple you. So, they disciplined the husband. This is a biblical role of a man. This is the biblical role of a husband. This is a biblical role of the Father. And the Holy Spirit worked in his life, and he took it in, and he changed. He not only stopped beating his wife, he also started helping her around the house.

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Whoa, what are you doing? Was the response of the other men in the community. Have you lost your mind? You're not beating your wife and now you're helping her in the home. What's wrong with you? We, you and I, think would consider that justice because here's what happened. The woman's not being beaten anymore. Guess what? She was having hope, and so she was freed in her mind then to hear what was being taught about how she can take care of her family and improve the health of her family, guess what? In a short period of time then her kids weren't getting sick anymore. So, she and this family now have more resources to live whole lives. Their health was impacted. Their souls were impacted. They were Christians. Her well-being was impacted because she wasn't being beaten. And now they have more of a partnership in their marriage. It's not a man owning the wife, but it's a partnership. And that's how Food for the Hungry and many other likeminded organizations, that's how we approach ministry.

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There's this ongoing debate, what do we do for, kind of like chicken and the egg type of thing? Which comes first? Do we share the gospel so that they will come to Christ and then maybe we can worry about their physical needs or not or when I hear a lot, well, let's meet people's physical needs so that they'll be fed and warm so that they can listen to our gospel message? So, in that scenario, it sounds okay while we're providing for their needs. Now, we may not do it in a way that restores their dignity and brings them to self-sufficiency, but we're providing for their needs. But the subtlety in there is then it becomes a way to get, what's the word I'm looking for? It becomes an agenda that are helping them with their physical needs or their practical needs, however you want to put it.

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Our agenda is, well, we just want them to hear our message as Food for the Hungry. We believe the biblical response is both. And why does it have to be one before the other? Jesus didn't see them that way. Why can't they be done together? Just like in this village in Ethiopia, they were taught the biblical world view. They heard the gospel message, and they were being trained in the health issues.

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I was with, another story really quickly, I was with our health team in Guatemala last spring and followed them in their work one day and they went into one of the schools and they were teaching children how to brush their teeth. That's ministry, would you ever thought of that ministry is teaching kids how to brush their teeth, but that's helping them live whole lives. But not only were they helping the kids brush their teeth, but while the kids were learning about teeth brushing, they were also learning the biblical principles behind why it's important to brush your teeth. Because there's a loving God who loves you, who created you, and who desires that you be well. And so that's why you should care about your own health and about brushing the teeth. It was happening at the same time, the spiritual message along with the physical message.

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And so, Food for the Hungry. We seek to bring hope to people, into communities, by helping the people in the community come to a point of wholeness in a self-sufficient way. I like what some of you said about we don't want to do it for them because that brings them to greater dependency,

and it robs them of their dignity. But we want to help people see that there is hope. And we want to help them get to the point where three things we want to see happening. First, we want to see churches in the community learning how to take ownership of the community and learning how to reach out to meet the needs of their community holistically. We want to see community leaders learn how to identify the needs in their community and then solve them. So, it's not you and I coming in as outsiders doing it for them, but they're getting to the point where they are increasingly being able to solve their own problems. And we want to see family members like this couple in Ethiopia learn how to meet each other's needs. And if we see those three things happening, we're helping to bring justice to that community.

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And it's sustainable within that community. We want to come into a community, have an impact for a short time, and then be able to leave because we're not needed anymore, and justice is happening in that community. So, we may send missionaries out to do health training. That's ministry, we send missionaries out to work in communications to tell everybody back here what's going on over there, that's ministry, we may send a water engineer out to work with the community to identify methods that they can get clean water.

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While we're living incarnationally in the community and sharing people through words but also through relationship about Christ, that's ministry. And my encouragement to all of us, myself included, is, let's not try to put ministry in a box. I think we lie to ourselves by saying, well, I can't be involved in helping meet the needs of the poor, be involved in going overseas, or be

involved in ministry because I'm not a church planter or God hasn't given me the gift of evangelism. Well, that's wrong. God can use your skills, your passions, your talents, your education to help bring justice to people, whether it's in Los Angeles, Bangladesh, a cornfield in Indiana, wherever.

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So, we don't want to focus on food for the Hungry. We want to focus on justice for the poor. But if any of this interests you, there are any number of ways that us college students can be involved in what God is doing around the world to meet the needs of the poor. And we'd be happy to talk to you about that. You can visit with us over under the tent, but, Mark, you can wrap us up.

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Mark: I think the biggest thing yeah, just to echo some of his sentiments that we want to just hit home here today is like, okay, we had you talking, we had you giving examples. You have an idea. There's a picture in your head somewhere just as to the poor. This is what this looks like, and that's what we want to see you do right here in our backyard. There is poverty down the street. There is poverty going on in the homes right here. Poverty of the soul, people that just don't have friends, people that don't have the money to take care of simple things on their house. And so, it's just an issue of getting involved in the lives of the poor. That is justice to the poor.

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And so many of you have talked about relationships and meeting people and meeting people where they're at, and that's just we want to hit that home that this is something very easily

doable. So, we would just send you out with that and empower you. And there are opportunities at Food for the Hungry. There are opportunities at other organizations out there. There are opportunities at people that aren't even represented at this mission's conference to do stuff right here, right now, make an impact for the kingdom. So just get excited what God's doing, and we want to thank you for coming out today.

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Speaker 1: We do have a few minutes left. Are there questions or comments that any of you want to make? Okay. She asked me to describe our organization a little bit for people who aren't familiar with it. Yeah. Food for the Hungry, we're a relief and development organization. And really what we're about is holistic transformation in people's lives and the idea of people being transformed in all these areas we've been talking about our programs focus more on what's known as community development that's going into communities in poor countries. And basically, those three things I mentioned. We work with churches in a community to equip them, to meet the needs of the community. We want to work with community leaders who could simply be a mother who is a natural leader, working with the leaders to help them solve the problems in their community, and then working on the family level.

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So, some of the ways we do that, we have child development programs, which is funded in part through child sponsorship. We have a lot of health and nutrition programs. Agriculture, water, sanitation, little bit of micro-inflation rises. I'm forgetting a major one. My fatigue's starting to set in. Yeah, like female savings groups. There's a big one. Church development and leadership

development training in churches. That's a big issue because a lot of churches are pastored by people who have only a third-grade education.

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So that's a little bit about who we are, what we do. And again, it's helping people learn how to meet their own needs physically, but also helping their worldview to change. We have opportunities ranging from short term teams you can go for ten to 14 days, to career missions, semester study abroad program for college students, internships in our Phoenix and Washington, DC offices, a volunteer advocacy program here in the US. So those are some of the ministries that have that people in this country can get involved by going, but also by even staying here in the states and impacting world poverty in that way.

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Yeah. The question is, what do we do when we see communities and used community here, for example, a big community that wastes a lot of food? And do we speak into that issue? Is that the question is if they get some of that food somewhere else over there? Yeah, there's a lot of waste. We really don't. And I think one of the reasons is that wouldn't be sustainable. What I mean by that is, for example, if we're taking our waste and sending it to people who don't have food in Africa, then they're learning to depend on that food from us. What we want to do is help them deal with whatever issues they have that are preventing them from raising enough food to feed their families. That's a great idea. We really don't do that.

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I know there are at least in Phoenix where we live, there are ministries that do go around and collect excess food from like restaurants and take it to homeless ministries or soup kitchens. I would hope there's something similar here in the LA area, but I'm not sure that's not something food for the hungry does get involved in. But it's a good idea. That's why I've kind of put on a few pounds lately because I take enough trips overseas. I come home; I hate to see food wasted. So, my kids leave food on their plates. I feel like it's my responsibility to eat it. It's a different issue. But maybe time for one more question.

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I did read recently and surprised me. I didn't realize this. You guys probably all knew this, but McDonald's has, I guess, and maybe you can tell me if this is wrong. I read it in the newspaper, so I'm hoping it's correct that McDonald's has stopped with their super sizing. Did you know? They haven't. Maybe it was just in a specific community. Did someone else have a question? All right, well, thanks, you guys. Appreciate your being here. Have a great day.