

Speaker Talk – Practise What You Pray

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Introduce yourself and thank the church for their support

Introduction

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Do you have enough (stuff, money, clothes, food, gadgets, etc)? How much is enough?

Let's consider, for a couple of minutes, the difference between a mindset of scarcity and a theology of abundance.

You don't have to go too far back in your memory archives to recall the great panic buy of 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic hit the news and we hit the shops, for loo roll in particular. But why? What caused the panic? The following quote is from an article in the Guardian from April 2020, "What is generally called panic buying – a common human response to crisis – is not caused by food shortages per se, but by fear. At its root is a fear of scarcity, and this fear is self-fulfilling, because the more people anxiously stockpile, the more others get infected by the panic and the faster the food runs out."

The panic buying which caused the shortages of loo roll, pasta, hand sanitiser, and other household necessities was due to fear – a mindset of scarcity. A mindset which dictates that I need to get all I can now because there may not be enough to go around later. A mindset which can only be acted on by the wealthy, or relatively wealthy.

And, what's interesting about this mindset is that it is contagious and self-fulfilling. But this mindset isn't just reserved for times of pandemic or world emergencies, we live with it day in and day out. But this doesn't need to be the case. There is enough to go around! Especially if we can heed the words of Paul in Philippians 2:3-5,

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“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”

A Theology of Abundance

At Tearfund, we believe in a theology of abundance. This isn't a theology of excess but instead teaches us that God has already provided all that we need, if we live with each other in mind.

We all know, whether from personal experience, or the stories we hear and see, that abundant wealth rarely leads to happiness and contentment anyway. So why spend our lives working for something which is likely to disappoint us and deter us from what God really wants for us?

The local church, when it takes on “the same mindset as Christ Jesus” - whom it exists to represent - is key to accomplishing God's purposes for creation; and Tearfund is passionate about this local church! I am here this morning to help you understand the power of the local church to change lives and transform communities.

Church and Community Transformation (CCT)

Since 2006, 47 million lives have been transformed through Tearfund's community projects, including our Church and Community Transformation model.

Our new Impact Report, which saw more than 8,000 people across four African countries surveyed, revealed that people who participated in our Church and Community Transformation programmes were 35% more likely to be hopeful about their future. That's what happens when the church acts like Christ! More of the incredible impact of Church and Community Transformation will be revealed later!

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Important to us at Tearfund, and the motivation behind what we do, is our theology of poverty. We understand poverty as the consequence of four broken relationships: one between God and myself, another between myself and others, another between myself and creation, and the final one between me and myself.

Poverty is a result of these broken relationships, and is something that we all face. Sometimes that poverty is in the form of material poverty, such as the lack of money or food, but it can also come in other forms, such as spiritual poverty. Our broken relationships can lead us to labelling some people as 'poor' but poverty affects us all.

Some of us may have plenty of money, but face a spiritual poverty that eats away at our earthly happiness, peace and significance – a poverty that only Jesus can lift us out of. Others may be confronted with a spiritual and material poverty, which not only impacts our happiness and peace, but also destroys our ability to have hope for a better future, here and now.

Through Church and Community Transformation, we're helping people living in extreme poverty to realise that they are not without hope; they have purpose, significance, skills and resources that they can use to lift themselves out of poverty. And this realisation comes through Bible studies run by the local church. As people realise that they have more than they thought they did, and that they have been blessed by God beyond their recognition, they are filled with hope and can begin to plot their way out of poverty, alongside their neighbours.

Burundi video

I would like to show you a video now. This was taken from a recent trip to Burundi and illustrates the power of Church and Community Transformation when a community commits to its principles.

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As that video shows, Tearfund does not do the work for, or on behalf of the community. Tearfund simply provides training for the church leaders on how to run the Church and Community Transformation Bible studies. The church then runs the studies for anyone in the community who wishes to attend. As the groups meet to study the Bible, individuals discover their purpose, significance, skills, resources, and their potential as people, created by a loving and powerful God. When this happens, answers to the community's biggest challenges begin to be found and implemented.

So, what's your role?

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In our reading from 2 Corinthians 8, Paul encourages the church at Corinth to give from what they have, not what they don't have;

Starting with verse 11, "Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: 'The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little'."

It's pretty obvious that we don't live in an equal world. In January, Oxfam published their, "Survival of the Richest" report which states, "During the past decade, the richest 1% had captured around half of all new wealth." That is not an equal world.

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At Tearfund, we use the phrase, “Poverty is not God’s plan - YOU ARE.” We, as the church in the West, (the institution and the individual) have the opportunity, responsibility, and privilege to partner with God in what he is doing to build his kingdom.

Prayer

How do we, the church, do this? One way is by prayer. Tearfund’s Country Director – Hebdavi - in the Democratic Republic of Congo says “prayer changes things on the ground”. We should never underestimate the power of our prayers.

The Bible is full of examples of answered prayer, and encouragements to pray - fervently and continuously. We know prayer changes things which is why prayer is at the heart of all we do at Tearfund.

Our prayers are meant to be bold and aspirational; faith-filled, asking God to do something bigger than what we can do on our own.

However, our responsibility doesn’t end with prayers of faith, because we all know, as it says in James 2, that “[faith without action is dead](#)”. Instead, our prayers should lead us into action, knowing that God is leading us where we are going, preparing the way before us, and empowering us to accomplish his purposes. That’s why we’re running a campaign called, “Practise what you pray”. Because, in addition to prayer, we give. And, if we believe in the transformational power of the local church, then we can see how our giving contributes to the effective healing of the four broken relationships we discussed earlier.

When the relationship between us and God is restored we can see ourselves as purposeful creatures of a loving, powerful and gracious God. We realise that we are not defined by our poverty, but by his generosity. His generosity which is demonstrated through the gift to us of Jesus, and the ongoing gift of His Spirit in us. When this relationship is healed all of the other broken relationships can more easily begin to be restored as well.

When I know that God has forgiven me and extends his gracious love towards me, I can then forgive myself and others. I can also then accept and apply God's plan for creation to be stewarded, not consumed. Thus the four broken relationships begin to be healed, and people are lifted out of poverty - both spiritual and material.

The local church

In our video from Burundi, the community was able to raise over £30,000 on their own, in order to build their own health centre. They then, on their own, managed to pipe water from the bottom of the hill to the top so that the health centre had running water. Because the inspiration for the project came from experiencing the Church and Community Transformation Bible studies, the result was that the church grew as well, requiring a bigger building and more churches to be planted. This is why Tearfund is passionate about the local church and its ability to end extreme poverty.

Meeting Jesus is only the beginning of the journey. A local church provides the community we all need to make the most of that journey, personally and communally.

So, is it clear yet what Tearfund's role is in this transformational process?

The film that accompanies our "Practise what you pray" campaign helps identify the role that Tearfund plays, and it might surprise you how small, yet significant, that role is. Let's watch this 60 second video.

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The short film we just watched features Cecile, a 28-year-old wife, and mother of a 1-year-old child.

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Cecile lives in Burundi and has gone through the Bible-study training at the local church. She and her husband are farmers and this training opened her eyes to the opportunities within and around them.

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Cecile's story helps to illustrate how poverty is often about perspective, and what you believe to be true, rather than the reality of what is true when you can change your perspective to God's perspective.

In Romans 12:2 we are encouraged to “renew our minds”, because what we think reveals what we believe to be true, so if we can change what we think, we can change what we do.

What I hope you find refreshing about this film is that we're not just focusing on needs around the world, instead, we're also focusing on what God is doing through the local church and the impact that is having. Cecile, featured in this video, has experienced what a change in thinking can mean for her future sustainability. Isn't this exciting?!

We genuinely believe God has shown us a remarkable way to transform the lives of countless millions of people living in poverty - The Church! Tearfund is currently partnering with 25,000 churches in over 50 countries around the world. Our vision is to roll out CCT to 250,000 churches in the next 7 years. But we can't do this alone. We need your help! As I mentioned earlier, this model of Church and Community Transformation releases enormous potential.

An invitation to join in with what God is doing

Our prayer here at Tearfund is that the UK church will have a mindset of abundance. We know that can be difficult in times like this, but we also know that we serve a big and generous God.

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What we are seeing is that God is doing what he always does when we give sacrificially to him; He is multiplying the gift. If we think about the feeding of

the 5,000, Jesus didn't feed the crowd out of nothing, he fed them through the sacrificial gift of a child's lunch. The multiplication being experienced through our Church and Community Transformation model, far exceeds the gift.

Every £1 invested by Tearfund in local churches helps the community to unlock a further £7 in time and resources for shared projects, which ultimately creates £211 of social value in terms of improved wellbeing. Where else can you see £1 transformed into £211?

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Over a year,

- £6 a month could deliver CCT training to a community through the local church
- £12 a month could deliver CCT training to two communities
- £25 a month could train 10 local church members to run a community transformation programme every year

I'd like to invite you to partner with us in this work, and give to Tearfund today. Will you sign up to give £12 a month this morning which could deliver CCT training to two communities to help them overcome extreme poverty? When you give to Tearfund you are giving to the flourishing of individuals and the church.

If you feel led to support this work, I'd like to encourage you to fill in the form on your seat and you can hand it to me at the end of the service.

I'll look forward to chatting to you then. Thank you again for the invitation to come and speak to you today.

Close.