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HOPE IS HERE

Abby Schabel

Hope is here! Imagine a village of severely impoverished people saying this as you walk down the street. For most people, this seems out of reach. The idea of changing the world is intimidating. It is common for people to have the attitude that the world is too messed up to change or that one person cannot make a difference so it is pointless to try. I will admit that there are times when I have thought, “Changing the world is a nice idea, but it will never actually happen”. Issues like ending racism, poverty, and inequality are all lumped into the discouraging category of “impossible.” An issue that my heart goes out to is poverty in third world countries. I am involved in several organizations whose missions are to help these countries such as Hope 2 Liberia, The Boaz Project, and Operation Christmas Child. While I know these are great organizations and I love trying to make a difference, sometimes the problems just seem too big to overcome.

The statistics one can read about poverty are overwhelming. One that has always been especially discouraging is the way wealth is distributed in our world. I know when I read how many kids are starving or need water that while the solution is not easy, there is a solution there. However, it seems like poverty will always be an issue because the greatest percentage of the wealth in the world belongs to only a few people. A way to visualize this is the champagne glass distribution of wealth. It shows how large of a gap there is between the incomes of the richest people in the world to the poorest people in the world.

This graphic is from 1992, but unfortunately, research shows that the gap still exists today (Korten, 1992). April Jurgenson, co-director of The Boaz Project that is a ministry to orphans in Russia and India, told me once that she does not give a lot of thought to ending poverty. This seemed strange to me since ending poverty would surely help the orphans she works with, but then she explained that instead of trying to end poverty, she believes it is her job to help the people God has placed in her life. She said, “I don't pretend to have the wisdom it would take to solve it. Honestly, I think it is beyond human scope. Rather, I think about doing what God puts in front of me.

He didn't tell me to end poverty, but to care for the poor. So, I

believe I can make personal sacrifices of time, money, effort, and voice to advocate for, protect and serve the poor. If we who are blessed with more materially shared open-handedly with those who are in need, the world truly would be a better place,” (Jurgenson, 2015). While Jurgenson is talking about poverty in this case, I believe it can apply to any issue the world is facing. The idea of ending a huge issue definitely seems impossible, however if everyone could look at things the way Jurgenson does and do their part to change the world, it really would be a better place. If we all have the mentality that we cannot make a difference, then we will not, but if we each have the mentality that we can change the world, then I believe collectively we will.

While there are many famous examples of individuals who have started movements or organizations that have helped change the world, perhaps the most important lesson I have ever learned about changing the world is from someone that is not famous at all. Randy Tempest is a good family friend and a board member of Hope 2 Liberia. The mission statement of Hope 2 Liberia is, “to provide safe and living water for the nation of Liberia, resulting in better health, available education and stronger leaders; all culminating in a renewed sense of hope,” (Hope 2 Liberia, 2010).

Liberia, among many other African countries, is severely deprived of a resource that we take for granted. According to the 2010 report from Oxfam, an independent organization from the United Kingdom studying the needs of the Liberian people, three out of four Liberians have no access to safe drinking water and six out of seven cannot access sanitation facilities such as toilets (Hobbs, 2010). It is disheartening to think that there are so many people going without something so basic. In this graphic, one can see how many countries struggle to have safe drinking water, and Liberia is in the dark red zone (Cooley, 2014, p. 167).

Hope 2 Liberia was unofficially started in 2005, after three men made a mission trip to Liberia, and it became recognized as a not-for-profit in 2010. Now, with the help of many donors and supporters, Randy and the rest of the Hope 2 Liberia team is doing amazing work to bring water and hope to the Liberian people. Simply put, the reason Randy works so hard to help the people of Liberia is because they are in desperate need of it. In addition to the problems Liberia has with clean water, they just emerged from a 14-year civil war, which has left the country devastated. With little infrastructure in place, an unemployment rate over 85%, and a lagging economy, the people of Liberia are in need of help (Hope 2 Liberia, 2010). On Hope 2 Liberia’s website, this graphic can be seen under a tab “Why Liberia.” After reading the facts, it is easy to see why Randy and the people of Hope 2 Liberia are working so hard to do their part to help this country.

With this in mind, the work that Randy does seems even more important, but it also seems extremely overwhelming. It would be almost

impossible to get clean water to all of the people who need it. Something that Randy likes to say is, “There’s no greater ministry than the person right in front of you,” (Tempest, 2016). The reason I love this saying so much is because it puts perspective on the issue of changing the world. To Randy, changing the world is making a difference for the person right in front of you. With Hope 2 Liberia, they may not be giving the whole world safe water, but for the villages that they help, it makes a world of difference. Often, we get caught up in the fact that one person can only do so much, but if we have the right perspective, one person can make a huge impact. Can one person really change the whole world? It depends on how you look at it. Randy believes your mission should never be greater than the person in front of you because impacting people is what really matters. If he can change one person’s life for the better, then he is changing the world for the better. If we all did this, then no problem would seem too big to tackle.

Hope 2 Liberia is not an organization made up of just one person. There are many people working with Randy to bring hope to the Liberian people and the work that each person does to bring clean water to them has saved countless lives. I believe Randy is accomplishing his goal of impacting the people around him in the work he does with Hope 2 Liberia, and that is changing the world. As Randy demonstrates, making a positive impact on the world does not have to be discovering the key to world peace; it can be as simple as buying food for a family in need or adopting a child who does not have a home. Most people would not think of these things as changing the world, but acts like this can change a few people’s worlds, and if everyone did that I think we would end up changing the whole world. The key is how you look at it. In the novel Brunelleschi’s Dome, we learned how important it can be to have a different perspective. Brunelleschi’s ideas for the dome were very unorthodox and daring. He changed the way domes were made by deciding not to use any external buttresses or supporting centring. This made building the dome extremely challenging. In these images, one can see the traditional centring that would be used as support when building a dome and Brunelleschi’s design for his dome. The Florence Cathedral Dome was an unprecedented accomplishment. Its largest diameter is slightly greater than that of the Pantheon and it is twice as tall (Mainstone, 2009, pp. 19-20).

Brunelleschi had to invent many devices to even make his vision of the dome possible, however, without his unique perspective, there would be no brilliant dome on top of the Florence Cathedral (King, 2000). In almost everything in life, perspective is important, and changing the world is no exception. One does not have to make the news or become famous in order to make a difference. Countless people do small things every day to make the world a better place. If we could change our perspective from one person needing to change the whole world, to each person making a difference to the people around them, then the world would be a better place.

Something else I have learned from Randy is the attitude one needs in order to produce change. With whatever he is doing in life, Randy likes to say, “We don’t have to, we get to,” (Tempest, 2016). While this may not seem like any groundbreaking advice, if we really try to live our lives by this saying, we would all be better off. When thinking about changing the world, if we look at it as “we get to” make a change, instead of “we have to” it relieves the pressure. When Randy is working with Hope 2 Liberia, he feels that he gets to help the people of Liberia. He feels blessed to be able to change these people’s lives, and it brings with it a sense of passion. Taking the “we get to” attitude makes you feel a passion for the cause rather than a duty. I believe when someone is passionate about something, like Randy is, then it will lead to change. Terry W York, conductor and associate professor at Baylor University, discusses in his article *Passion and the Conductor* that the key element of a good musical performance is not perfection, but passion. Each person, from the conductor, to the singers, to even the audience, needs to bring passion or else the performance will be lacking (York, 1999, pp. 31-35). This applies directly to service. If someone is not passionate about their cause, it will be hard for them to make an impact. If they focus only on being perfect and carrying out their duty to the community, but lack passion, then just like the musical performance, their service will not reach its potential. The reason Randy and Hope 2 Liberia have changed so many lives is because everyone involved brings passion to their cause. Something they like to say is “Hope can’t wait”. This is because they have seen too many people die from reasons they should not have. Because of this, they don’t “have to” build wells for the Liberian people, they “get to” and it makes them try harder each and every day to bring hope to these people.

Along with the right perspective and attitude to evoke change, there is also a practical side to carrying out Hope 2 Liberia’s mission. Because there are very poor sanitation practices among the people of Liberia, it is not enough to simply install a new well. Educating the Liberians on proper sanitation practices and proper use of the water systems is essential. To purify the water that is available, Hope 2 Liberia installs Sawyer water filtration and purification systems. The filters they use are based on the same technology as kidney dialysis. They are made up of tiny "U" shaped micro tubes with pores as small as 0.1 micron absolute, so that no harmful bacteria, protozoa, or cysts can get through. The water that comes out of these filters is 99.9 percent free all harmful bacteria. The cost of one filter with a bucket kit is approximately 60 dollars. The amazing thing is this is a one-time cost because these filters are designed to last a lifetime. Even more impressive than that is how many people just one filtration system can help. The system is designed to be used with any size container, which means one filter system can serve a single family, or depending on the container size, an entire village or community may be served. One filter can produce up to 500 gallons of

safe water per day (Hope 2 Liberia, 2010). In total, Hope 2 Liberia has installed six large water systems, nearly 500 family water systems, and 12 wells. The work Randy and all of the people associated with Hope 2 Liberia have done is truly life changing for thousands of Liberians.

The reason that this filtration system is such a powerful tool in helping the people of Liberia is because of all the health consequences that can come from drinking contaminated water. The majority of diseases in Liberia are caused by unsafe drinking water. Every year thousands of Liberians die from dysentery, cholera, typhoid and infectious hepatitis due to compromised water (Hope 2 Liberia, 2010). It is almost unbelievable how many people globally die from diseases that people in the United States or other developed countries do not have to worry about. This chart shows the number of deaths and DALYs (disability-adjusted life years) from various water-related diseases from 2002-2004 across the world (Cooley, 2014, p. 272). In 2003 there was a particularly bad outbreak of cholera in Monrovia, Liberia due to increased civil conflict in the country. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "During June 2-September 22, of an estimated one million permanent residents and 172,000 IDPs in Monrovia (1), 16,969 (1.4%) persons sought medical care for an illness consistent with the surveillance case definition for cholera," (Briand, 2003).

Cholera is an acute, diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with the bacterium *Vibrio cholera*. It is spread by ingestion of contaminated food or water. The infection is usually mild and has very little symptoms, but can sometimes be serious and even life threatening. Cholera causes many deaths in third world countries even though it is easily prevented and treated. Experts attribute the cholera outbreak in Monrovia to an acute shortage of clean water, poor sanitation, and crowded living conditions because of the civil war. This image shows the increase in cholera cases by the week from January-September 2003 in Monrovia (Briand, 2003). Fortunately, there were treatment centers set up to help with this epidemic and the case-fatality ratio in cholera-treatment centers was less than one percent, however this still resulted in many deaths that could have been avoided with clean drinking water.

In the article *Water for the Third World*, the point is made that many fecal-oral diseases like cholera, typhoid, diarrheas, dysenteries or hepatitis are spread because of unsafe drinking water. The article also reiterates one of the beliefs that Hope 2 Liberia has, that improving the water quality alone will not change the situation. The people in these countries also need to be taught proper sanitation, or else deaths that are easily preventable will keep occurring (Biswas, 1981). This is why Hope 2 Liberia has extended their ministry beyond just water. They have also built six medical clinics, a church, a Hope Center, a school (Hope Academy), a soccer field, and repaired an orphanage.

The mission of Hope 2 Liberia is to bring hope to these people, and it comes in many different forms. There are a lot of organizations and people that are trying to make a difference in the world. The reason I love the work that Randy does with Hope 2 Liberia is because it brings hope to a group of people that have no other reason to have hope. Randy told me that every person he meets there is the poorest person you will ever meet. They live in devastating conditions, but Hope 2 Liberia is beginning to change that. All of the numbers and statistics of the way they are changing lives are amazing, but it is hard to quantify the impact Randy and the Hope 2 Liberia team has made. One of the best things about Hope 2 Liberia is that they have stuck with these people for over 10 years now. The people of Liberia know that they can count on the Hope 2 Liberia team, and it has made a huge impact. Now, Randy says the Liberian people are following their example and really want to make a change for their country. They are even learning a new way of farming which can increase their crop yield 70 times. Randy and the Hope 2 Liberia team have done the seemingly impossible; they have changed the world. Maybe not the entire world, but they have changed a lot of lives through this ministry and they are not done yet.

Now, with their white shirts that say Hope 2 Liberia, the Liberian people know them as the people who bring hope. It is not easy to do what they have done. It takes a new perspective, dedication, and passion to evoke change, but when Randy and everyone wearing those white shirts walk down the street, the Liberian people shout, "Hope is here!" and it really is.

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