

poverty: a challenge for missionaries

Owen Lewis has been a doctor in Nepal for over 10 years. He writes about the overwhelming challenge of caring for the poor, who are more interested in eating today, than hearing about grace, forgiveness or Jesus.



Sunil sits at the reception desk outside the Disability Clinic.

Yesterday in the ‘disability clinic’ which is just as much a ‘clinic for the poor’, an old lady came complaining of an itch.

“What do you mean?” I said.

“Down there, its hanging out.”

“Ok show me,” I replied.

“But doctor I’m hungry, I haven’t eaten today, don’t you have something here for me?”

This was followed by five minutes of “this is a just a clinic, and I am just a doctor” while one of our staff, Sunil went to make a cup of tea.

Then her son came in. I know him well as I have been sorting through his chest problem for several weeks. He is an old treated TB case with a bad chest and no TB germs to see under the microscope. The chest x-ray showed an “almost completely whited out” left side. So I was thinking of cancer when I sent him for further tests.

It turns out he has a lung full of pus due to bronchiectasis (rotten bronchi). For the rest of his life he will drain out

cups full of sputum every morning. He has been a “tailor” and hasn’t been able to work, he said.

I said, “I am sure you can start work again, you have to earn some money to eat and feed your mother. Starting your sewing business again would be a good idea”.

“Teler, not tailor” he replied, indicating one who pulls a hand cart for a living, like a taxi truck service. “I cannot do that now”. Granted, he is definitely not fit for pulling a hand cart.

“Who else is in the family?”

“Just mother and I. I have a sister in Karkevitta.”

His mother enters the discussion: “I don’t have the 200 rupees for the bus ticket to go to her”. If her son cannot feed her, perhaps her daughter could. I felt furious and frustrated.

We talk about first feeding (sharing the word) with people and then giving them the word in words. In medical work it’s not much different. This

old lady has a procidentia, or womb hanging out, an advanced form of prolapse due to damaged pelvic muscles after childbirth years ago. She is more interested in eating today than fixing up her old problem that has been a source of irritation and embarrassment for years.

After a cup of tea, she agrees to come into my hospital clinic to fit a rubber ring to hold her uterus in place, along with necessary creams and advice.

For many in Nepal, today’s problems are hunger, fear and uncertainty, more acutely felt than the need for confession, reconciliation and forgiveness. Why don’t they get organised to help each other - the poor on the street? There are so many idle middle class people about, who only complain. If I am going to speak a word, which one?

The Disability Committee in Nepal is a registered non-government organisation that works to improve the situation of individuals and disabled people as a group. CMS-A keeps Dr Owen Lewis at work with the Disability Committee to heal and to help, and to explain the why - that God loves and values all people and sent his son Jesus to save.

global poverty: a challenge for Australians

Checkpoint speaks to Amanda Jackson from the Micah Challenge about how Christians in Australia can play the



What does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8

our part in addressing the problem of poverty.

Every three seconds a child dies because of extreme poverty. 1.2 billion people currently live on less than US\$1 a day. 115 million school-aged children are not in school and more than one billion people do not have access to clean water.

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She believes Christians have a Biblical mandate to engage with the issue of global poverty. The character of God, as revealed in the Bible includes caring for the poor and the outcast and the needy. "God cares for the whole world – the lovable and the unlovable and we need to do the same," says Amanda.

Taking action

But how can we do the same? How can we, in Australia, play our part in addressing the problem of poverty?

1 Firstly, we need to remember the poor when we pray. Amanda encourages Christians to stop and pray "whenever we see anything on television that touches our hearts about injustice or poverty . . . Prayer does change things, and we should respond to this issue prayerfully and prophetically."

Praying at specific times when big decisions or big meetings are taking place is also important. According to Amanda an election is an exemplary time for Christians to be "praying that the right people will get in and that they will act faithfully and honestly and with integrity".

2 Secondly, giving money to help with projects on the ground is a valid response which "can make a huge difference in the lives of communities". However, giving money to projects often doesn't address the larger questions of why people are poor and what keeps them poor.

3 So thirdly, Amanda strongly believes that a Christian response to global poverty is more than just individual action. A Christian response to global poverty involves Christians acting together. "We can pray, we can give of our money, we can care, but we can also start to think about the decisions that are made by governments and we can call for justice in the way that decisions are made and in the way poor countries are treated around the world."

Amanda says one of the things that we need to do as Christians is uphold the values God places on life and people, and be vocal about what we want our

leaders to stand for – at home and abroad. One of those values is "the way we treat the least of the people in our society and the way we treat the least of countries in our dealings with them," says Amanda.



As part of taking action together she encourages Christians and churches to send a letter to their local Member of Parliament (MP) asking them to act on global poverty. Such action brings results, as we've seen in the Jubilee 2000 debt reduction action already.

Pray for your MP. Invite them to come to your church and tell them that you are praying that they will do a really good job as your representative.

Solvable

Global poverty is solvable.

"Why doesn't global poverty get solved? Why do people still die of starvation? Why do children still die from drinking dirty water?" asks Amanda.

Global poverty is solvable.

"It's not because we don't have the resources. It's not because we don't have the technology. It is because we lack the will. And if we can say to politicians that we want you to have the will, then they will listen because we vote. I guess it is as simple as that."

CMS-A is a signatory to the Micah Challenge. For more information visit www.micahchallenge.org.au.

Micah Challenge

