THE GREAT CHASM

HOW TO STOP OUR WEALTH FROM SEPARATING US FROM THE POOR AND GOD

DEREK W. ENGDAHL

"*The Great Chasm* has dressed up Lazarus and the rich man in 21st century clothing. In doing so, this book has uncovered something of our own poverty. After years of sojourning with those on the margins, Derek Engdahl has earned the right to do some exegesis from the edges. He tells stories from his experiences in a way that bring Luke's manuscript into focus. We are given lucid prose to see afresh how it relates to our world today. *The Great Chasm* is a work which will help close today's chasm between rich and poor."

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"Derek Engdahl challenges our lives of comfort by drawing on the scriptures that likewise challenge our comfortable lifestyles. Integrating many compelling stories, he calls us to take wealth and poverty seriously, just as the Bible does. If you desire to see the gospel lived out and the chasm between rich and poor bridged, read this book."

—**Jude Tiersma Watson**, Associate Professor of Urban Mission in Fuller Seminary's School of Intercultural Studies. She lives in a struggling immigrant neighborhood in Los Angeles as a member of InnerChange/CRM.

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Sample Review Copy

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AND GOD

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Servant Partners is an interdenominational evangelical missions agency that sends, trains, and equips those who follow Jesus by living among the world's urban poor. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we seek the transformation of communities with the urban poor through church planting, community organizing, and leadership development.

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For my wife, Lisa

INTRODUCTION

In 1998, I spent a couple of days with Ray and Annie in their squatter home in a Manila slum. Conceptually, I knew there was real poverty in the world—I had even seen some of it—but I had never *lived* in it, not like this. I had never personally known people who endured such destitute conditions until that moment. For a few days, they opened their home and their lives to me. They lived in a very small house with a dirt floor. The living room/dining room/kitchen area was about eight by ten feet. Huge rats ran through the house and under the sink while we ate together. They feared neither us nor the slum cats, which were not large enough to threaten them. The bathroom was a corner of the room separated by a shower curtain. The house had no running water, so in order to bathe you had to fill up a large barrel and then pour water over yourself with a small bucket. The sewage from the toilet ran straight out to the canal behind the house. Even though the canal was only a couple of feet deep, you could not see the bottom through the blackened water.

A rickety ladder led to the loft that served as the bedroom for the family of five. Three children slept on a full size mattress, and the married couple slept on the floor in a corner of

the loft separated by a curtain. While I was with them, Ray and Annie gave me their mat and slept with the children. I stared up at the ceiling as I fell asleep that first night. It was very hot and humid. Street noise loudly filled the room. The ceiling was made out of found objects, the most prominent of which was a sign advertising fish for sale. As I struggled to sleep with the heat and the fear of visits from corpulent rats and two-inch flying cockroaches, I thought, no one should have to live like this.

I was newly engaged at the time and carried some pictures of my fiancé to show to people. Ray took one of the pictures—of the rose I had given her when I proposed—and meticulously lacquered and framed it for me with the tools he had. I was moved by how much effort he put into making it beautiful, and he was visibly proud of it when he presented it back to me. It was the first of many gifts from the poor to be displayed prominently throughout our house.

I had never thought of myself as a rich person. I was raised in a middle-class family and have lived much of my adult life in the lower portion of that category. But in Manila I realized I was, in fact, very well off. Ray and Annie's life is not that unusual. Half of everyone on earth now lives in an urban center. Of that half, almost one in every three people live in a slum. While the percentage of slum-dwellers relative to the larger population has been falling over the last twenty years, the overall number continues to climb.[1] As a whole, about fifty percent of the world lives on less than two dollars a day.[2] I easily could have been born into poverty without much chance to alter my circumstances. As an asthmatic, I might not have had access to medicine and hospitals like I did here. I might

not have survived childhood. I might never have gone to college, gotten a job, owned a car, or bought a house—things that most middle-class Americans take for granted. I took my wealth for granted, giving little thought to those who had so much less. Though I knew people like Ray and Annie existed, I did not personally know them or their struggles. It was easy to ignore the plight of the faceless poor, but it was harder to ignore them once I saw them as real people—as friends.

There is a great divide between the rich and poor of this world. Half of the world's population lives on less money per day than many of us spend on one coffee from Starbucks. Some people live in mansions, while others take shelter in cardboard boxes. Some pay to lose weight, while others starve to death. Some are planning for their retirements, while others struggle to make it through the day. Both groups may have knowledge that the other exists, but they can hardly relate to each other's experience.

We are all aware that we do not all live at the same level, but a problem arises when we try to identify who is rich and who is poor. Can only those who are at the extreme ends be called "rich" and "poor," or is there some dividing line that puts us all in one category or the other? It might depend on one's perspective. Those of us living as middle-class Americans rarely think of ourselves as rich, yet we are very rich to people living in American ghettos and barrios, not to mention people in majority world slums.

The poor are equally difficult to define. Those who fall under the poverty level in Western society often live with greater material comfort than those at the bottom of society in poorer countries. Are they then not truly poor? Poverty

and wealth are, in some ways, relative, and yet we know them when see them. People with resources naturally insulate themselves from those they consider poor. My wife and I bought a house in a gang-ridden, inner city neighborhood in 2002. When we were looking for a house, we gave our realtor the instructions that we were not interested in living in a neighborhood that was too nice. She replied that in her forty-some years in real estate, she had never heard that request. That is because people usually seek to live in the best—i.e. wealthiest, safest, best educationally equipped community they can afford. They move away from areas that they may consider dangerous or less than what they and their children deserve. This is, after all, the American dream; we naturally seek what we consider to be better lives for our families. To do otherwise is even considered irresponsible by some.

Our lifestyles and where we choose to live are normally dictated by income and education. We tend to surround ourselves with people who are like us. It's simply more comfortable. This impulse also affects what churches we attend. It has been said that eleven o'clock in the morning on Sunday is the most racially segregated hour during the week, but I would guess that the class divide in our country is at least as great as the racial one. Very few congregations are socio-economically diverse. Even churches that boast of their cultural diversity often draw people from the same socio-economic class. Ultimately, we want our church experience to be comfortable, to meet our needs as we see them. If we are educated, we gravitate to congregations that have other educated people. If we are affluent, we seek out congregations with people of similar lifestyles.

Most of us do not have deep relationships with people outside our social class. And sadly, the church has almost nothing to say about this. On any given Sunday, thousands of sermons are preached, but how many Christians are hearing about God's concern for the poor, his demands for justice, the dangers of wealth, or the need to lay down one's life in service to our poor brothers and sisters in Christ? I am not convinced that the whole gospel is being proclaimed weekly.

We are still faced with questions about who the poor are, however. Which level of poverty deserves our generosity? Are there righteous poor and unrighteous poor, those who are worth helping and those who are not? Can we assign a dollar amount that divides who will be considered poor and who will be rich? Who exactly is my poor neighbor?

An expert in Jewish law asked Jesus a similar question in Luke 10. Jesus responded with a parable about a Samaritan who, unlike some Jewish religious leaders of the time, had compassion on a victim of robbery and beating. This parable is usually interpreted as a story of how a disliked, second-class citizen—the Samaritan—overcame prejudice to love a man who would be his enemy. But as a friend once pointed out to me, the text is unclear about the victim's identity. We do not know if he is Jewish or not, wealthy or poor, a good person or an evil one. He was stripped naked, leaving nothing to identify him. He never speaks. Perhaps he was unconscious the entire time. All we know is that he was in need, and maybe that is all the Samaritan knew as well. Jesus does not mention anything about the victim's identity because it does not matter. The point is that the Samaritan did not care about any of those things; to him, the victim was a neighbor who needed to be helped.

In the same way, the poor are those who are powerless or vulnerable. They are victims of injustice and lack the resources to meet their needs or easily change their lives. If we were in their situation we would want to be helped. We don't have to determine exactly who is truly poor, or righteously poor. We only have to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Some of my friends have argued that we should not use the term "poor" at all since it carries such negative connotations. Many who suffer from poverty might be uncomfortable describing themselves as poor and could perceive our use of the language as another form of oppression. This is a valid point. Yet there is a biblical distinction between those who are comfortable and those who are in need. If we lose the language for that, we could end up losing the underlying issue. I think it is particularly important for those of us who are "rich" to understand that there are people in situations different from ours. We also need to be sensitive to the fact that those we would consider "poor" may not feel similarly about themselves, nor might they refer to their communities as "slums," though someone from an affluent perspective might label them as such.

I remember as a child visiting a friend of my mother who lived in a poorer part of town. We were dropping her child off when my friend who was with us said, "They live *here*?" I unfortunately replied, "Yeah, the slums." My mother overheard me and took me to task for being incredibly elitist and insensitive (though she did not use those exact terms). Obviously that was hurtful to our poorer friends. It implied that I thought I was better, that I looked down on them. I do not believe we can really wrestle with the topics of wealth and poverty without using such terms as "rich" and "poor"—but I hope I do so with sensitivity.

I also need to clarify that when I use the terms "rich" and "poor" in this book, I mean the materially rich and poor. This is an important distinction. As we will see, those who are materially poor can be rich in other, more important ways, while the materially rich often suffer from other forms of poverty. It is also important to note that the term "poor" is sometimes used positively in Scripture, just as the term "rich" is sometimes used negatively. We don't need to shy away from these words; we simply need to recapture their full meanings.

Even when there are great differences in actual material wealth, there are often similar patterns within poverty situations. Many of the same issues are found in poor communities around the world, despite the variances in material wealth within those communities. People in the inner cities of America feel the same powerlessness as those in the slums of Asia. The same vices surface in Los Angeles as they do in Bangkok: alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, participation in the occult, and violence. These are things people often turn to when they are despondent and frustrated, desiring to escape their lives. Poverty is not simply a lack of money. While it is related to money, it is fundamentally a result of dysfunctional relationships.

In his book *Walking with the Poor,* Bryant Myers explains this idea well:

> The poor are poor largely because they live in networks of relationships that do not work for their well-being. Their relationships with others are often oppressive and disempowering as a result of the non-poor playing god in the lives of the poor.

> Their relationship within themselves is diminished and debilitated as a result of the grind of poverty and the feeling of permanent powerlessness. Their relationship with those they call "other" is experienced as exclusion. Their relationship with their environment is increasingly less productive because poverty leaves no room for caring for the environment. Their relationship with the God who created them and sustains their life is distorted by an inadequate knowledge of who God is and what God wishes for all humankind. Poverty is the whole family of our relationships that are not all they can be.[3]

This dysfunction exists even in the most affluent nations. If we really knew our poor neighbors, we would understand that their struggles are greater than merely a lack of income. However, since most of us move away from poor neighborhoods if we have the means to do so, we quickly become detached from our neighbors' needs.

One of the first books I remember reading on the topic of wealth and poverty was *The Call to Conversion* by Jim Wallis, the founder of Sojourners. In it he wrote that the rich might have concern for the poor, but rarely have true compassion. Concern is feeling bad when you see something bad happen to someone else. Compassion, on the other hand, is seeing your brother's pain and believing that you cannot let him continue to suffer in that way. Compassion requires real relationship: "That is precisely what the affluent lack with respect to the poor—any real feeling of relationship. We have no relationship with the poor because we have no proximity to the

poor."[4] Jim Wallis first challenged the church about this issue over thirty years ago, and even though many have responded, his description of American society, and the American church, is still largely true.

In 1998, I joined Servant Partners, an organization that ministers to the urban poor around the world. As a white, middle-class man, I moved into a working poor neighborhood in the city of Pomona on the eastern edge of Los Angeles County. I began a journey of downward mobility that has brought me into deeper relationship with people very different from myself. Others have been doing the same thing for decades, people who have been influenced by the teachings of John Perkins, Viv Grigg, Ray Bakke, Robert Lupton, Robert Linthicum, Tony Campolo, Jim Wallis, and others. Their prophetic voices have called thousands of people to live among the poor and have inspired a new generation of prophets as well. While these voices were important in my decision to relocate to a depressed Latino community, it was Scripture that convicted me that loving the poor and working for justice were not optional as a Christian, but rather fundamental to what it means to be a disciple. I have come to believe that how we relate to the poor of this world affects our salvation because it affects our relationship with God. One cannot know Christ and not know the poor; to ignore the needy, the oppressed, and the helpless is to ignore Christ himself.

This truth is evident in Scripture. Poverty and wealth, the rich and the poor, are major themes throughout the Bible. Jim Wallis said, "Jesus talked more about wealth and poverty than almost any other subject, including heaven and hell, sexual morality, the Law, or violence."[5] Though it may not get much

attention on Sunday morning, this subject is very important to God, and this book is an effort to prove that case. I wish I could provide a very thorough look at every passage that deals with the poor and the rich in the Bible, but as such a pervasive subject, it would require more space than I have. Instead, I want to focus mainly on the 16th chapter of Luke. The majority of the chapter is taken up by two parables: one about a shrewd manager and the other about a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. Reflecting deeply on these two parables, as well as looking at other related Scriptures, we will begin to gain a fairly thorough, but by no means comprehensive, portrait of God's feelings about the poor and the rich—and how we as followers of Jesus are supposed to respond.

In the second parable in Luke 16, a rich man ignores the plight of a poor man, Lazarus, outside the rich man's gate. When they die, angels carry the poor man to Abraham's side, while the rich man goes to Hades. God in his justice reverses their roles—the rich man now experiences agony, and Lazarus, comfort. A great chasm is fixed between them, a gorge so massive that no creature could cross from one side to the other. For once you are on one side, you are there for eternity. Before they died, the rich man and the poor man were also separated by a chasm—a socio-economic divide. Their lives were radically different, and they had no connection to each other. The rich man never saw Lazarus as his neighbor and, therefore, never sought to leave his comfortable life to care for him, even though he passed Lazarus every day. He did not show mercy to others in his earthly life, so in the next life he was shown none.

A number of years ago, I was again in Manila, this time visiting a poor village on the outskirts of the city. To get to the

village, we had to cross a rope bridge that was suspended over a gorge. The villagers used this bridge every day to connect to the larger world. Having little fear of heights, I led the way for our group, jumping out onto the wooden boards. About ten feet out, the boards began to crack under my weight. The bridge was used to carrying svelte Filipinos, not well fed, two-hundred-pound Americans. I instantly slowed my pace, respecting the danger of the task I was undertaking.

Crossing a chasm is never easy. It is costly, awkward, and scary, and we will likely make many missteps. But while the great, eternal chasm cannot be crossed, the chasms in this life—the ones that separate us from each other, the rich from the poor—can be. The question is: will we get on the bridge while there still is one?

1

LOVING THE LOST

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls

together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them.

"A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

"But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father.

"But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

"Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.'

"Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!'

"Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

—Luke 15:1-32, NRSV

A number of years ago, I was on my way to visit our Servant Partners team in Bangkok, Thailand. There was a bit of a crisis, and it was important that I get there as soon as possible. I got in line at the airline counter and pulled out the folder where I keep my passport. As I was doing so, I realized that in my haste I had not double-checked to see if my passport was still in the folder before I left the house. As I opened the folder my fear was confirmed; my passport was gone. Slightly panicked, I got out of line and called my wife to see if she could find it. It was after eleven o'clock at night and our daughter was asleep, but I hoped that if my wife could find it, someone could make the hour drive to the airport and get it to me. I had just enough time to make the flight if someone left in the next few minutes. After looking for quite some time, she called me back to tell me that it was nowhere to be found. I had evidently lost it after coming through customs on my previous trip. It was gone for good. I started to feel sick. I felt irresponsible for losing my passport. I felt anxious about having to contact the team and tell them I was not going to be there the next day, maybe not for another month. There was nothing I could do but return home and start the process of obtaining a new passport. It was amazing that the loss of so small a thing could affect my life so much.

If you have ever lost anything valuable, you know the overwhelming panic, fear, and sadness it can cause. That feeling is exponentially greater when the thing that is lost is a person. Every parent has probably experienced a moment when they thought their child was gone; even if it only lasts for a couple of seconds, it is the worst feeling in the world.

Luke 16 opens with Jesus teaching his disciples. The scene, however, really begins in Luke 15 with an interaction between

Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees.[1] The more I have studied these chapters the more I believe they should be looked at together. Understanding the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son will help our understanding of the context of chapter 16.

Years ago, I attended a leadership conference at Willow Creek Church in Illinois. Bill Hybels spoke about an epiphany he had one day while reading the fifteenth chapter of Luke. He realized that by repeating the images of the lost three times, Jesus was emphasizing just how important the lost are to him and, therefore, how important evangelism is. Though I agree with Hybels' observation that Jesus is very concerned for the lost, I do not think this passage is primarily about evangelism, at least not in the sense that we often think of evangelism.

The section begins with a complaint from the Pharisees: Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners, something no truly religious person should be doing. Despite the fact that he seems to be a righteous person, he actually welcomes and socializes with the dregs of society. He responds to the religious leaders' indignation with these three parables, all of which have some basic similarities as well as differences. Rather than attempting to interpret each parable to its fullest, I will focus on just a few relevant elements.

All three parables are about something lost. In context, it is clear that the lost things represent the tax collectors and sinners. Each lost thing—from each parable—belonged to someone at one point; the sheep belonged to the shepherd, the coin belonged to the woman, and the son belonged to the father. Each lost thing was also part of a larger whole; the sheep was

part of the flock, the coin was one among many coins, and the son was part of a family. In turn, each becomes lost, separated from the larger whole; the sheep wanders off from the flock, the coin is separated from the rest of the coins, and the younger son decides to leave his family. The tax collectors and sinners who Jesus ate with were at one point part of the Jewish family of God, but they had wandered off—from both God and his people.

In each of the parables, there is also an extensive search for that which has been lost. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to look for the one that wandered off, the woman lights a lamp and searches her whole house for the coin, and the father, though he gives his son the freedom to leave, keeps watch for him on the road, which is why he is able to see him at a distance. This was Jesus' ministry. He was finding the lost and bringing them back home. This is different from what we traditionally consider evangelism. The general mission of evangelical Christians is to reach people for the first time, people who have never known God, who do not believe in God. These tax collectors and sinners, on the other hand, were at one point in relationship with God. They were the children of Abraham, people of the covenant. Their problem was not that they did not believe in God, but that they had become "sinners" because of the lives they had chosen, or that had been thrust upon them. And in becoming sinners, they were estranged from the rest of the family as well as from God.

We often read these parables through strictly spiritual lenses. The lost, we might say, are lost spiritually because they have wandered from God and chosen lives of sin. But in the context of these parables, we realize that their "lostness" is also social,

economic, and even political. Joachim Jeremias defines "sinner" as:

> (1) people who led an immoral life (e.g. adulterers, swindlers: Luke 18:11), and (2) people who followed a dishonorable occupation (i.e. one that notoriously involved dishonesty or immorality), and who were on that account deprived of civil rights, such as holding office or bearing witness in legal proceedings—e.g. customs officers, tax collectors, shepherds, donkey drivers, peddlers, and tanners.[2]

I wonder if the poor and disabled might have sometimes fallen into the category of sinner as well, since their misfortune might have been thought of as the result of unrighteousness. Even the disciples seemed to hold this worldview (John 9:2). The lost, then, were those who were cut off not only from God but also from the rest of their family, the rest of the sheep, the rest of the coins. They were outcasts, condemned by the larger social order. They suffered both from the consequences of their actions and from the judgment of others. The fact that the Pharisees would not consider eating with such people only emphasizes the fact that their estrangement from the religious establishment was not completely their own choice.

The last parable makes this point most clearly. When the younger son decides to ask for his inheritance and leave the father, he loses everything. When studying this passage, I questioned why Jesus goes into so much detail about what happens to the son after he leaves. If the parable were just about spiritual "lostness," the point could have been made fairly succinctly. He could have squandered his money and ended

up impoverished. That would have been enough to suggest that his choice was foolish and that life with the father would have been better. Instead, Jesus spends a good deal of time on the many hardships that befall the younger son. I believe that these details are important in order to understand in what ways people become, or are, lost.

The younger son certainly initiated his own hardship. He demanded his inheritance early so that he could become independent and live the life he desired. He broke relationship with his father and the rest of his family and left for a foreign land, not realizing how much his father, and his own home, had to offer him. He ran off to some first century version of Las Vegas to indulge every carnal desire. Eventually his money ran out and his life in the fast lane came to an abrupt end. In a brief moment, he spent a lifetime of wealth. So when a famine came he had no resources to fall back on. The famine was not a consequence of his sin, but his sin made him vulnerable.

When he had to get a job, he ended up with the worst job a good Jewish boy could have—feeding pigs. This would have been revolting to him, probably equivalent to an American feeding sewer rats. More importantly, the scholar I. Howard Marshall argues that the ancient Jews would have considered feeding pigs an unclean occupation. Helping to raise pigs would have been strictly forbidden for an obedient Jew.[3] In order to survive, the son chose a job that was not only shameful but that he knew was sinful. He was so destitute he longed to eat the pods he was feeding to the pigs. In other words, the pigs were better taken care of than he was. His employer exploited his vulnerability, not even paying him a livable wage. No one gave him anything; he received no mercy from any-

one. The nation of Israel was commanded to care for the sojourner and the poor, but in that foreign land the younger son had no such safety net. He was truly lost.

Through this parable, Jesus summarizes the various states of those around him who had become lost and impoverished. Some people had chosen to gratify their selfish desires and had lost their relationships with God as well as their fellow Jews. Others were victims of circumstances beyond their control—famine, drought, or disability—and perhaps others were victimized by oppression. For some, the choice may have initiated a downfall. For others, their misfortune or mistreatment may have led them to turn to what was considered sinful activity. In any case, these lost and impoverished people had no one who showed them mercy.

I once visited Aling Nena at her home in Manila. Viv Grigg had written about her in his book *Companion to the Poor*—she was his landlord in a slum called Tatalon. Though I knew her story through Viv, this was the first time I had heard it from her. She told us how her husband died unexpectedly, leaving her without any income. In order to afford food, she would hold up taxi drivers at knifepoint. It was hard to imagine this tiny woman being able to rob grown men of their fares. She opened a gambling den and rented out rooms in her home for additional income. In order to ease her suffering, Aling Nena turned to drink and became an alcoholic. Eventually, she came to Jesus and turned her life around, becoming a pillar in the local church. Her story is not only an example of how a person can become lost, but also how disasters strike and force decisions that send life into a tailspin. The "sinners" who sought out Jesus—and who the Pharisees looked down

upon—were lost not only spiritually, but also socially and, in many cases, economically. Grigg has observed that the causes of poverty seen in the Bible can be put into three categories: personal sin, calamity, and oppression by others.[4] The younger son falls into all three.

Eventually the younger son realized that life with his father would be far greater than what he was enduring. He knew that his father's hired hands were treated justly. Because of his sin and the insult against his father, the son did not believe he had any right to be taken back as a son, but if he could become a servant, at least he would no longer be suffering in poverty. This situation begs the question as to whether he truly repents for his actions or whether he simply does the math and realizes that he would be better off returning home. I would argue his repentance in this moment is essentially genuine. Understanding that he would be better off with his father and turning from the disappointing life he had voluntarily chosen exemplifies the essence of genuine repentance. Helmut Thielicke wrote of this parable:

> When the son thinks he has come to the end of his road, then God really begins his way. This end, from man's point of view, and this beginning, from God's point of view—this is repentance. . . . It was not because the far country made him sick that he turned back home. It was rather that the consciousness of home disgusted him with the far country, actually made him realize what estrangement and lostness is.[5]

The people who suffered from their own choices, as well as from things done to them, were the ones that flocked to Jesus.

When they encountered Jesus, they realized he offered them something invaluable that they had lost—a way back to the Father and out of the deprivation they had experienced.

One of our Servant Partners staff members was raised in a squatter community in Manila. She ended up marrying an American who had voluntarily moved into her community to serve the poor while he was in graduate school. After their schooling—she was in college at that time—they were married and continued to live in the same squatter community. The first time they went back to his home in the United States, she told her husband that she wished he had never brought her to America. All she had ever known was the slum; now she knew how middle-class Americans lived. The experience of American wealth exposed the poverty she lived in. Before that poverty was just reality; now it was a choice. They did follow God's call to return to the slums, but her eyes were forever opened to the suffering there. Encountering Jesus opened the eyes of the lost. In him they saw wealth that exposed the poverty they had become resigned to. In him they found the acceptance and mercy that they had been cut off from.

The father longed for the younger son's return. When he saw him in the distance he had compassion on him; he sprinted out to him and embraced him. Compassion was his first response just as it was for the Good Samaritan. Luke tells us that they both "see" and then "have compassion." The father did not dwell on how his son had sinned against him and the family. He had not rehearsed an "I told you so" speech. His emotion was not anger, self-satisfaction, or disgust. It was compassion. Between these two parables—the

Good Samaritan and the lost son—Jesus gives us examples of his own motivation, which we are to emulate. When we see those in need, our response should be compassion—because it is Jesus' response. It is the divine response to suffering.

Many things can block our sense of compassion. The Samaritan could have been more concerned about his time and money than the man who was beaten by the robbers. If he had known the victim to be Jewish, he might have been glad that tragedy had fallen on an enemy. He could have thought that this man was someone else's responsibility. Similarly, the father could have been bitter toward the prodigal son. He could have believed that his son had deserved the consequences for his poor choices. Any of these thoughts can keep us from feeling sympathy towards those in need, but they are all related in one way: they are all symptoms of selfishness. If we are consumed with self-protection, self-justification, and self-gratification, then compassion is impossible.

The father's compassion led him to respond in a remarkable way. He did not listen to the son's well-rehearsed speech meant to get him back into the house as an employee. Instead, he welcomed him back as a son, restored all of the family honors upon him, and celebrated with a feast. He cared little about the disrespect shown to him, as his only concern was the safe return of his son whom he loved.

Rejoicing over what has been found is another element that is common to all three parables. We are naturally happy when finding something that was lost, especially if that object has great value. When we lose something, we often think we have lost it forever; we mourn its loss. So if we find it again, it is like new life. When the son leaves, the father considers him not

only lost, but also dead. His return, then, is as if he has come back to life. Surely that is cause for joy.

Those of us with children know that it is difficult to explain the love we have for them. It is hard to put into words. You do not choose to love your children; you love them because they are part of you. When young, they are dependent upon you, and you are the world to them. We love our children even when they do things that make it hard for us to love them, and sometimes this means making agonizing decisions. I have a friend whose son struggled with drug addiction. He was making life for the whole family unbearable. They tried many things to help him but nothing worked. One day, my friend and his wife changed the locks on their house when their son was out. When he returned, they told him he had to find somewhere else to live until he got his life in order. Eventually, he did deal with his life and was welcomed back into the family. Their love for him never ceased—even when it meant sending him away.

Jesus offers us an intimate glimpse of himself and his Father with this last parable. He considers sinners and outcasts his children. He loves them like his own because they are his own. Even though they have made bad choices or are considered the least in society, they are no less important or valuable than those who stayed home like "good" children. In these three parables, Jesus emphasizes the importance of the whole, united community. He is not content with the ninety-nine sheep or the nine coins or the one older son; he wants the whole. Which is why the lost are of special importance; if one is gone, something is always missing. We all understand this unique value for the lost. If you had several children and

one was tragically kidnapped, you would not think, "Oh well, we have three other kids. We won't miss little Suzy." Rather, you would make every effort to find the one who had been separated from you. Instantly, everything else would become less important. As parents, we understand that no matter how many children we have, we could not bear to lose one. The same is true with God and his children.

The father in the parable is overjoyed by the restoration of his family; the older brother, however, is not at all happy with the younger son's return. Paralleling the Pharisees' contempt toward Jesus when he welcomed tax collectors and sinners, the older son does not respond with compassion. In the older son's mind, the younger son did not deserve to be taken back into the family. He had sinned. He had disgraced his respectable family while the older brother continued to labor tirelessly on behalf of the family. The older brother was outraged that such a son not only would be welcomed back, but celebrated as well. He refused to go to the party for his brother, choosing to stay outside.

When the father learned that his oldest son was outside, he left the party to beg him to join the celebration. The older brother responded, "Look, I have been slaving away for you for years and I never disobeyed you. And you never even gave me a cruddy little goat to have a party with my friends. But *this son of yours* comes back having used up your wealth on prostitutes and you throw him a huge party. How is that fair?"

To which the father replied, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was right for us to celebrate, because *your brother* was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found."

This story is fundamentally about relationships; the relationships between the father and his two sons, and the relationship between the two brothers. Neither son had a very good relationship with the father. The younger son believed that the world had more to offer than his old man, not realizing how good he had it until he had lost everything. Even then, he never imagined just how gracious and extravagant his father was. The older brother also had a distorted relationship with his father. He viewed himself as a servant in the household. He slaved away, believing that if he worked hard enough he would inherit the estate when the old man died. The father reminded him that everything he had was already his; he was not a servant but a son. But more importantly, the son was always with the father. The father does not condemn the older son, but rather honors him.[6] He affirms that it was good he stayed. However, the son was so focused on working away for a future reward that he neglected the present relationship with his father. The Pharisees were in the same boat. Jesus did not condemn their desire to be righteous, but they, too, misunderstood the Father. They considered him a boss, not a parent.

It is interesting that when the older son goes on his tirade, he refers to the younger son as "your son," but when the father responds to him, he calls him "your brother," a point I italicized above. The older son was happy to cut off his delinquent brother; the misfortune that his younger brother suffered likely reinforced his view of himself as the good, responsible son. While his father was looking to the horizon, hoping to catch a glimpse of his lost child, the older brother was busying himself in the field. Ultimately, what the father wanted was for the older son to be truly glad that his brother

was back. After all, the injury was done to the father not the brother; it was the father's wealth that was squandered. If the father could forgive the younger son, why shouldn't the older brother?

The point of the parable is that the whole family should rejoice when the lost is found, just as the father does. The repentance of the son is somewhat secondary. Despite the fact that we call this the story of the Prodigal Son, he is not really the focus of the story: "In the end it is not so much the repentance of the son as the communal joy of the restored and reunited family which is the culminating note in the parable."[7] Jesus, like the father in the story, was appealing to the Pharisees to be joyful over the return of their lost siblings. Unfortunately, the Pharisees felt the same way as the older brother; namely, they were happy to cut off the unworthy. They did not see these sinners as brothers and sisters needing to be brought back into the family, but as unfaithful servants deserving to be condemned. Their sin made the Pharisees feel more self-righteous because they had avoided becoming like them.

I think we may view the poor in this same way today, especially those who have chosen sinful lifestyles. Most of us are politically correct enough not to say things like, "The poor get what they deserve because they are lazy or stupid or sinful," but we subconsciously believe that we are not in their situation because we are a little better than they are. Examine your heart and see if I am right. The human heart loves to justify itself. We compare educations, incomes, positions, possessions, our accomplishments, and the accomplishments of our children—even our own holiness. Could it be that the poor make us feel better about ourselves?

The older son told the father that he never disobeyed his command, but when the father begged him to enter the party, he refused. He had not been obedient to his actual father, but to his own idea of who the father was. He had become estranged from the father because he would not love as the father loved.[8] The parable ends unresolved; we do not know if the older son goes in or not. It stands as an open invitation to the Pharisees; they can stand on the outside, angry that Jesus would welcome such undeserving people, or they can join the celebration and be glad that their brothers and sisters have returned to the family. Jesus wanted them to join the party; he wanted them to be restored to their outcast siblings. But to do so, they would have to change their view of God and their relationship with him.

The Father wants the family reunited. The goal is not only to bring people back to God, but also to bring them back into the social and economic networks that can sustain their physical lives. Maybe this is evangelism after all. It is not just about getting people to say a certain prayer and join a church, but to restore relationships. The poor of this world are often cut off; they are not treated as part of the larger family of humanity. This is true even in the Church. The average local suburban congregation may have sympathy for those suffering in poverty, they may even have some programs that help the poor, but they still do not treat the needy as lost family members who need to be brought back into relationship. They do not see them as siblings for whom they are morally responsible. We treat them as "God's Children," not "Our Brothers and Sisters."

It is tempting to draw a line separating those we feel responsibility for and those we do not, those who are like us

and those who are not. That inner circle may be as small as our individual persons or our immediate families, or as broad as our class, cultural group, or nationality. At some point, most of us make a distinction between "us" and "them." However, we have no place creating such divisions. Jesus has already instructed us in Luke that the greatest commandments are to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. The two are related. To be in a healthy relationship with the Father means loving the younger brother, precisely because the Father loves him. It is to see him as a brother, precisely because the Father considers him a child. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus redefines what it means to be a neighbor. The Samaritan was a good neighbor because he cared for the needy person despite potential cultural or socio-economic barriers. In the parable of the lost son, Jesus redefines the idea of neighbor itself. The outcast is not merely a neighbor, but a sister or a brother.

While the Japanese evangelist Toyohiko Kagawa was a student, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. The man who led him to Christ, Dr. H. W. Myers, paid for his hospital stay, but not wanting to burden his mentor, Kagawa moved into a fisherman's cottage in Tokyo where he preached the gospel to local fishermen. Because of his disease, no one wanted to get close to him. He was lonely. Myers came to visit him and stayed with him in the cottage, even sharing his bed. Kagawa asked why he was not afraid of him.

"Your disease is contagious," Myers said, "but love is more contagious."

Kagawa later wrote:

> At that moment, I realized more truly than ever what love really means: that love can have no fear; that love can have no limits; that love encompasses everything—the people sick like me and the people sick in spirit and mind. I thought I must love everybody too—even the horrible people in the slums. I decided I must not be sick anymore. I told God that if He would let me live I would serve His children in the slums. Pretty soon I began to get well again.[9]

The Father has that kind of limitless, fearless, contagious love for us. Despite our sick and miserable conditions, he embraces us, seeing us only as the children he cares so much for. This unconditional love—incarnated by Dr. Myers—taught Kagawa to love without restrictions. Kagawa moved into the worst slum in Japan and continued to proclaim the gospel. He took in the homeless, diseased, and mentally ill. He was robbed, threatened, and beaten, but he remained in the slums.[10] Over his lifetime, Kagawa led thousands to Christ and worked tirelessly on behalf of the poor by improving the quality of life in the slums, establishing orphanages, setting up credit unions, and organizing labor.

The Father's love should transform us. The fact that God loves us despite our ugliness should change us into people who love even those who seem ugly to us or to society as a whole. The Pharisees were unable to care about their outcast brothers and sisters because their relationship with their Father was not based upon love; it was about work, righteousness, and rules. It is difficult to give love if we are unfamiliar

with receiving it. If we have a hard time caring about the lost in this world, then we need to begin with our relationship with our Father. I often think about Paul's words in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul—a Pharisee himself at one point—underwent a great transformation of faith because of his experience of Jesus' love and sacrifice for him. His Savior's love was not abstract, theoretical, or theological; it was experiential.

Experiencing God's sacrificial love enables us to love sacrificially. Loving our brothers and sisters means seeking them when they are lost. It means having compassion on them, welcoming them, and rejoicing over them. It means being reconciled to them as they are reconciled to the Father and restoring them to their rightful place in the family, treating them as brothers and sisters and not as projects. Simply put, it means loving them as God loves them. The lost are not just those who do not believe in God; they are those who have become estranged from him and the rest of their family. Therefore, being "found" is more than coming into a saving relationship with God; it is the restoration of all relationships, based upon a true relationship with the Father. Understanding this truth will help us understand Jesus' teachings about our relationship with and responsibility to the poor.

A great chasm exists between the rich and the poor of this world. And Jesus calls us to bridge it.

Derek Engdahl has not only written a remarkable book on the relationship between faith and money; he has practiced it in his own life, family and ministry. The Great Chasm deals with money in three creative ways. First, it focuses on a biblical theology of money by intensively examining Luke 15-16 - but does so by accessing the full biblical panoply. Second, it deals honestly with mammon's psychological hold upon us (Engdahl's personal vulnerability and transparency is refreshingly candid). Third, it demonstrates to the reader the ministry that money can afford for all of us, including extremely practical and concrete steps we can take to discover that ministry for ourselves.

ROBERT LINTHICUM, retired urban pastor, mission executive, and author of *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference In Your Community*

Derek Engdahl writes, "You can't help everyone, but you can help someone." I am that someone. Growing up poor in one of Manila's infamous slums, I am a beneficiary of Jesus' love through His followers who made an effort to have a relationship with me to understand my struggles and the ugliness of poverty. Engdahl's book is a wake-up call in this day and age of consumerism to reflect, repent, and live a lifestyle that mirrors Jesus' heart for the poor.

EMA SMITH, Servant Partners Staff, Manila, Philippines

When confronting the radical teachings of Jesus in Luke 16, many scholars use their intelligence and sophistication to "tone down" the text to make it conform to comfortable consumerism. But in Engdahl's hands, Luke 16 becomes a prism which throws into vivid relief the prophetic, life-giving biblical spectrum of teaching on wealth and poverty. The Great Chasm winsomely blends insightful, informed exegesis with a lifetime of stories showing us just how freeing and exciting Jesus' vision of economic discipleship can be.

GARY VANDERPOL, Assistant Professor and Director of Justice and Mission, Denver Seminary

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