



Our Framework for Transformation

NURTURING TRUTH & CONFRONTING LIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Nurturing Truth & Confronting Lies	1
<hr/>	
The Impact of Lies	3
Lies Believed by Vulnerable People	4
Lies that Undergird Societal Systems	9
Lies that Impact our Responses to Poverty	11
How do we identify lies?	18
Nurturing Truth	20
Changing Beliefs	22
Teaching	22
Experience	23
Role Models	25
Testimonies and Stories	27
God's Intervention	29
Who Do We Work With?	30
Conclusion	32
Addendum 1: Reflect and Apply	33
<hr/>	
Addendum 2: Biblical Truths	38
Humanity	39
Creation	39

NURTURING TRUTH & CONFRONTING LIES

I remember the first time I heard Darrow Miller speak. One of his central ideas, as I remember it, was, "If you change someone's thinking, they will move out of poverty." It was a profound and head-scratching assertion. He basically argued that the more a society lives according to a biblical worldview, the more it will flourish. Since our behavior is driven by our beliefs, if we want societies to flourish, we need to change their beliefs. As leaders and those in influence understand truth, they will build just societies. As individuals understand a biblical worldview, their behavior will change and they will move out of poverty. At the time, I thought, "If this guy is correct (big IF), then it changes everything about how we address poverty."

Up until then, I had been involved in doing what were relatively standard development projects: vocational training, micro-enterprise loans, literacy programs, building toilets... While

there were definitely stories of people helped, there wasn't exactly transformation. I was quickly learning that a new toilet might be useful, but it can also be left unused or—since it's the nicest building in town—used to store food. A loan can result in income from a thriving micro-business...or the business enterprise can fail and leave the family with more debt. And even if a family has more money, that doesn't always equal more food for the children. Sometimes it just means more alcohol. So some great things were happening—more than enough to fill a newsletter—but that wasn't the whole story.

While I wasn't fully sold on Darrow's hypothesis, after years of pondering and praying (and witnessing ups and downs in terms of impact), I decided it was worth testing. What would happen if you were actually able to change someone's beliefs? Would they really move out of poverty?

My husband and I started by identifying some of the most common, basic lies that were holding back communities in our area. We came up with: *We can't do anything ourselves because we are too poor, God only cares about spiritual things, and We can't change the future.* Then we wrote materials to teach truth.

Four years later, whole communities were moving out of poverty.

Now, there were many factors that caused these communities to move out of poverty. The most important being "the God factor"—as churches sought to walk in obedience to God, He

responded with all kinds of miracles.¹ But without a doubt, after 15 years of testing the idea, I can say that changing people's beliefs is critical in any effort to bring transformation. Unless we identify the beliefs impacting those we work with and bring truth to counter lies, we will not see lives transformed.

“What would happen if you were actually able to change someone's beliefs? Would they really move out of poverty?”

The Impact of Lies

As Darrow shared, our beliefs drive our behavior. In India, for example, approximately ten percent of girls under the age of six are missing—killed either through abortion, infanticide, or neglect. The government has tried to stop this problem. They required doctors' clinics to take down signs that said things like, “Spend 1,000 rupee now, save 50,000 rupee later” (meaning pay for an abortion now and you won't have to pay for dowry later). They have also made revealing the gender of a child through ultrasound illegal. But still the problem of missing girls grows, because families see girls as a burden. They have sayings like, “Raising a daughter is like watering your neighbor's field” (as in, it makes no sense to invest into someone who will bring you no benefit in return). As a result,

¹ This is discussed in the booklet *Depending on God*. If you haven't read it, please do. You can download it at reconciledworld.org/depending-on-god.

government ministers have acknowledged that, until there is a change in the fundamental belief about the value of girls, there will be no real change in people's behavior.

Regardless of who we are, our beliefs shape our behavior. Our lives, likewise are impacted by the beliefs and behaviors of those around us. Those living in poverty or experiencing vulnerability are impacted by three types of lies: those they themselves believe, lies that undergird broken social systems, and lies believed by those responding to poverty.

Lies Believed by Vulnerable People

Satan's primary tool for meddling with humankind is deception. Jesus called Satan "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Without doubt, lies are his favorite tool for holding people in brokenness. These lies are often taught to us as children, and perpetuated by media and cultural norms. It is nearly impossible for us to identify and root out our own lies. Unless someone or something challenges these wrong beliefs, we struggle to really change.

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Sadly, churches typically only address a few of the key beliefs that we need to change. Many lies that lock people in poverty or oppression are overlooked. In the Majority World, some of the most common misbeliefs are:

- **We are born poor, we will die poor; there is nothing we can do to change our destiny.** Most poor people around the world believe that poverty is their destiny. If they are subsistence farmers, they believe their children will be farmers and their grandchildren will be farmers. They see little point in educating their children past grade two or three, when they achieve basic literacy. They have no expectation that their children could be doctors, engineers, or anything but a farmer.

Many have never considered that their community could be any different in the future than it is now. As part of our Truth Centered Transformation (TCT) program, we have rural churches draw a map of what they would like their community to look like in the future. At first many are confused by the task, confessing, “We’ve never thought it would be different.” If they don’t believe things can be different, they don’t try to change things. They just accept life as it is.

- **We have nothing; we can’t do anything; we need someone to come help us.** Most vulnerable people truly believe they cannot do anything to address their own needs or the needs around them without outside help. Frequently, church leaders have told us they’ve been waiting for years for someone to come help them. It’s common to hear complaints about how the government has failed to

meet their needs or that their government is so corrupt that there is no hope of help. They have no belief that they can get started themselves, so they are left to wait.

In Uganda, one community shared that they had waited years for someone to build them a church, but no one ever had. After learning that God has called them to use all He has given them—their resources, talents, creativity, and energy—they looked around and realized that the dirt in their area made great bricks. They worked together and, within a week, had 15,000 bricks! They were able to complete the church and a school as well. For years they had waited, hoping someone from outside would come and give them what they wanted. And yet the solution was only a few weeks' work away.

We hear the same thing again and again—those who had waited generations for a well worked together to dig one in two days; those waiting for a school started one themselves. This lie—*We have nothing, and we can't do anything ourselves*—has locked billions into poverty and left them waiting for help, when the solution to their problem is already in their own community.

- **Women and children are possessions; they exist to serve men.** The destruction caused by this lie is unbelievable. It's not uncommon for a family to sell a daughter into a trafficking situation to earn enough money to provide for the others. Globally, one in three women have experienced violence, most of it in their own home. Girls living under this lie have less opportunity for education, since parents see it as a wasted investment. However,

numerous studies have shown the education of girls is a leading factor in everything from the health of a family to the financial prosperity of a nation.

Christ's bride is not immune to this lie. I have been in church settings where men have argued passionately that they should beat their wives, that it's their right, that women must be controlled, since they are "like children just demanding things all day." Other Christian men have tried to convince me that, because the Ten Commandments lists your neighbor's wife, servants, oxen, and house as things that you could covet, this proves they are all possessions and equal to each other.

This lie leaves women in far too many countries as domestic slaves, unable to have a voice or contribute their talents, gifts, ideas, and passion to build their family, community and nation. With half a nation unable to reach their potential, is it any wonder communities remain locked in poverty?

- **We are evil; we will never do anything good.** I recently consulted with an organisation that works in Sierra Leone. They told me, "Nothing works in Sierra Leone." When I asked why, they told me that most everyone believes that they were created evil and are unable to be any different. The color of their skin, they say, indicates the darkness of their hearts—and neither can change. Another group that I was training in South Sudan pointed out Old Testament verses telling of God's curse on the land of Cush, and then said, "That's us. We are cursed." Many in South Sudan truly believe that no good

can come to their country because even God is against them. These are just two examples of a widespread lie that has left communities and nations locked in poverty. For people who believe that they are suffering because they are destined to be evil, any attempt to better their circumstance is utterly futile. Why even try?

- **We are too poor to give.** The Bible promises us that God will give to us in the same measure as we give. Where does that leave those that believe they have nothing to give? In fact, the Bible doesn't exclude poor people from giving. In 1 Kings 17, Elijah approached a woman preparing her last meal and asked her to give. Few of those we work with are *that* poor. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 8:2, commended the Macedonians for giving despite their "extreme poverty." He certainly never refused to take what they wanted to give or suggested that they shouldn't have given.

The challenge that many of the poorest people face is that they can't see the many resources they have to give: time, energy, natural resources, creativity, prayer, the power of God, skills, and wisdom. In our TCT program, we challenge churches to start by giving their time, to serve by plowing a widow's field or helping dig a well. Time and again, when people have given in this way, they've seen God multiply their resources so they are able to do more in the future.

- **Luck/ the gods/ destiny controls how much our land produces or how healthy we are; good techniques or effort is irrelevant.** Often, when we ask a rural farmer

why one piece of land grows more than another, they don't respond by saying, "That person works harder" or "They use different seeds." They tell us that one farmer is lucky, the other unlucky. This belief—that it doesn't really matter what we do because the spirits or luck (or lack thereof) determine our outcomes—hampers many efforts to improve agriculture and health practices.

These beliefs, and many more, have been handed down from generation to generation. They are tools of Satan, used to keep vulnerable people locked in their situations. However, personal beliefs aren't the only lies that impact vulnerable people.

Lies that Undergird Societal Systems

Vulnerable people are also impacted by the lies that society believes. One of the most common and devastating lies is that some people have less value than others.

In the nation where I live, it's commonly believed that the minority people are unintelligent or backwards. Denominational leaders have told me, "They [minority people] are too stupid to learn." So, naturally, there is next to no Bible teaching that happens amongst the minorities. Holding to the same belief, the government makes less effort to develop minority areas and, when they do a project, their expectations for impact are low. Voices of minorities aren't valued or respected. And the minority people believe the lie that they are less valuable, because that is how they are treated.

Similarly, in one area of DR Congo, our leader told me that women have never been invited to attend trainings, because women are not capable of learning. Congo is also, statistically, one of the most dangerous places to be a woman. The widespread belief that women are less human leads to women being treated as less than human.²

Similarly those who are poorer are often looked down on, mistreated, and regarded as having less value. Those who can't afford a national identity card or an address miss out on the services that they desperately need. Governments rarely jump to solve this dilemma, because too often we just don't see these people as having the same value as ourselves.

Throughout history, this toxic lie—that some people have less value than others—has given rise to slavery, ethnic violence, and genocide. And the lie still permeates our societies today.

Another common lie in the Majority World is that those in power ought to be appeased. The lie flourishes in cultures where the predominant religion requires sacrifices or gifts to ancestors and spirits. The purpose of these gifts is generally to prevent bad things from happening at the whim of the spirits or to improve one's "luck." It's an easy leap from appeasing those that have power over you in the spirit world to appeasing others in authority—police officers, government officials, supervisors... It's considered their right. The logic is, "Give something in order to get something." Corruption runs rampant when societies are infected by this lie. The powerful

² Thankfully, the Holy Spirit moved the pastors, and they invited their wives to the second day of training!

exploit those beneath them, bribery is the norm to get anything done, and the rich get richer by extorting “gifts” from the poor.

Lies that Impact our Responses to Poverty

When I moved to Asia in my twenties to “help the poor,” I had no idea what to do or where to begin. I ended up living with someone who ran an organization and desperately needed help, and so I jumped in. Fortunately, some of the help that she needed was creating a budget, and that I could do. Unfortunately, she also needed help developing strategy, and I knew nothing about how to address poverty. More than just being clueless, I was guided by my own beliefs about poor people, what they needed, and how to help them. Some of the ideas I had were wrong, some dangerous, and some were probably okay. Here are a few lies that I wrestled with:

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- **Poor people desperately need stuff—lots of stuff.** When I first visited poor communities in the Majority World, it broke my heart. They didn’t have any of the things that I call necessities—safe homes, furniture, kitchens (or

“ God has not forgotten and neglected the poor. ”

even cooking stoves), bathrooms...They didn't even have enough food for their children. What parent should listen to a child cry because they are hungry? If I were in charge, none. I would be handing out food to them all. To me, the obvious solution was to raise money amongst those who have "too much" and redistribute it amongst those who don't have enough. I believed:

Poor families lack basic resources, so providing those resources solves their problem.

Like all of Satan's great lies, this one has just enough truth in it that it feels like it is all true. Obviously, poverty involves lack, and children do need nutritious food to thrive. However, what people trapped in *generational poverty* need most desperately is not food or stuff. They have a lot of resources. We just don't see it. But God has not forgotten and neglected the poor. For example they typically have natural resources, strong relationships, skills that are appropriate to their context, and—always—a loving and powerful God. What poor people so often need is the ability to see all their resources, and the skills to utilize them. But because we are trapped in the "stuff" lie, we end up reinforcing their own beliefs that they have nothing and can do nothing. We don't help them see what they have and use it. The parable of the talents teaches us that those who use what they have wisely will be given more. For those who don't, even the little they have will be lost. Rather than just moving

resources around the planet, we need to help people see what they have and how to use it well.

- **Projects—big projects—are the answer to poverty.** The problems were overwhelming and it seemed obvious to me that we needed many large projects if we were ever going to make a difference. We built schools, but thousands more were needed. We gave out loans, but millions more were needed. There was an endless demand for more projects. The problem is that big projects make us and our resources the center of efforts to address poverty. Vulnerable people don't have those skills or access to sufficient resources (hence why they're vulnerable). So the vast majority of the work is done by us—once again reinforcing the lie that they can do nothing and need outsiders' help.

Today I believe that wholistic discipleship—teaching people how to walk in obedience to God in all areas of their life—is the answer to poverty. We have to start where people are at, not with all the great projects that we think are needed.³ However, discipling people takes time, it starts small, and it looks really unimpressive to begin with.

- **Rural churches are broken.** A quick, basic assessment made it quite clear to me that the churches in our area were in a desperate state. Their sermons weren't biblical, their buildings were falling down, and they largely did

³ This idea is discussed in-depth in the booklet "Integrating Physical and Spiritual."

everything wrong (according to my not even remotely humble opinion). They would sing hymns that were completely inappropriate to their culture, force people into raising their hands to accept Christ, and, in far too many cases, baptise people who had no idea what was happening. And if all that wasn't enough, there was church politics. Sigh... I was fairly quick to conclude that churches weren't going to be the center of God's plan to bring transformation. They were *broken*. (Strangely, I was completely unaware that I was equally broken and unqualified to be used by God.) The problem with this attitude is that we disregard the church as we seek to address poverty. We fail to see their potential and, as a result, we neither invite them nor challenge them to be part of bringing transformation to their community. Instead we take the much easier path of just doing it ourselves.

“*the Church is
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Yet the Bible tells us that the Church is Christ's bride and body, His chosen instrument for building His kingdom. As broken as churches may be, our response should be to seek their healing, not to write them off.⁴ And as our experiences have taught us, churches are able to completely transform their communities.

4 This idea is discussed in-depth in the booklet "Partnering with Churches"

- **The poor lack knowledge and resources, and therefore cannot help themselves.** I believed this at some level for years. I was utterly confused when the first forty communities declared they had moved out of poverty. There was a good reason why: I truly didn't think they could do anything of significance. I had challenged the churches to do small things—like pick up litter and help harvest crops for sick people—but was certain that, eventually, they would get stuck and need us to turn up with truck-loads of resources. I remember hearing reports of churches building suspension bridges and feeling anxious: *How are they doing this? They haven't been to school beyond grade three.* I was quite sure that these bridges would fall down. None of them ever did (although one washed away in a typhoon, as did all the government-built bridges).

Fortunately I had little opportunity to communicate with the churches. Otherwise, I would have assured them that poor, uneducated churches could *not* build a bridge. As a result, hundreds of bridges would not exist—bridges that now enable children to attend school and farmers to work in their fields, bridges that were commended and copied by government officials, that caused whole communities to see Christianity in a different light, and that brought glory to God in ways I never could have imagined. Fortunately, God worked around me. And, in

the process, He taught me that, by His power and grace, poor people are capable of much.⁵

This belief that poor people cannot help themselves stops us from challenging them to try. As a result, so much that could happen doesn't, while the poor sit waiting for outsiders to come and help.

- **God is very interested in the lives of the vulnerable, but very removed.** He sent me instead. Never, not in a million years, would I have actually said this out loud or even admitted it to myself. Even now, I'm a little horrified to see it in writing. But my actions and responses told what I truly believed. I did always believe that God cared for the marginalized. However, despite the many promises He makes to them in scripture, I just didn't see the evidence of His activity. Entire communities could become Christian and yet remain poor. Seemingly, God was waiting for something. And in the areas where I went, there was a vague assumption that God's caring and involvement largely began and ended with

“do we point people to God to meet their needs? Do we challenge them to pray, expecting Him to speak to them, to send resources, to give them solutions to problems?”

5 This idea is discussed in-depth in the booklet “Depending on God.”

sending me and my coworkers to help (and maybe some funding). I certainly wasn't expecting that He would do miracles—lots of miracles. That when people started to steward what they had, God would multiply it. That as they served and loved their neighbors, He would literally *heal their land* so it would grow more.

It took me *years* to wrap my head around this. I didn't believe the first 100 people that told me their ground grew more. (That's related to the lie about the poor lacking knowledge. I figured they didn't even know what had caused their harvests to increase.) Eventually, even I had to admit that God was intervening, but I thought it was just something that happened to a particular group of persecuted people because God has a special concern for them. (I'm quite stubborn.) So God had us expand to other places, other people groups. Again and again, He intervened with miracles.

I didn't truly know I believed this lie until I stopped believing it. None of us consciously think it. But do we point people to God to meet their needs? Do we challenge them to pray, expecting Him to speak to them, to send resources, to give them solutions to problems? When we see ourselves as *the* way that God is involved with a poor community, we cut off those we are working with from the only real hope—God. We stand between them and their Savior as some ridiculous intermediary, singularly able to listen to God and dispense wisdom and resources.

This is just the beginning of the list. I could go on, but I think you get the point. It's not just the lies that poor people believe,

but also the lies we ourselves believe, that can keep them locked in poverty. Often our beliefs only serve to affirm the lies of the poor. Satan's crazy clever that way. We need to keep learning, keep digging into our Bibles, keep asking God to teach us, and keep our minds open.

How do we identify lies?

If we want to see transformation, we need to start by identifying the beliefs that are keeping vulnerable people locked in brokenness. The lies will vary depending on the issues that you are seeking to address.

We can start to see what people truly believe through their actions. Many will tell you that all are valuable, but the way they treat women, people with disabilities, or people living with HIV/AIDS (for instance) tells a very different story. Since our beliefs impact our behavior, our behavior also displays our beliefs. A church may say they believe that they are to bring glory to God through their good deeds, but have one "serving Sunday" a year. Their actions make it clear that serving is not that important to them.

“ *Since our beliefs impact our behavior, our behavior also displays our beliefs.* ”

Another great place to start to identify lies is asking lots of "why" questions and listening. As we developed the TCT program, we asked many church leaders, "Why do

you think that churches don't reach out to serve those around them?" We constantly got the same reasons: We are too poor; it's the government's responsibility; the church needs to focus on evangelism; we are the poorest in the area, the ones that should be served. The first lessons we wrote addressed each of these beliefs. As we continued, we heard more reasons (based on lies) why churches got stuck. From there we were able to bring more truth.

Similarly, our *In His Image* program trains churches in India to love and care for people with disabilities (actually, we prefer "different abilities"). As we developed our church-based training for that program, we asked the churches what keeps them from welcoming in differently-abled people. We were told, "The church should be a place of reverence, so disruptive behavior draws people away from God," and "The differently-abled make others uncomfortable." So we included in the curriculum stories about Jesus' interactions with all sorts of disruptive people (There are lots to choose from. Clearly He was very fond of them) and questions about God's intentions for the church (Is it meant to be a comfortable club?).

As you seek to address brokenness, whenever you hear someone say, "It's not possible, I can't..." it's good to start looking below the surface. What is driving that belief? Rarely will you find it's built on a biblical truth. (Unless, of course, it's something like, "I can't have an affair.") Keep asking questions and seeking to understand the beliefs beneath their words.

Nurturing Truth

There are some overall truths that we believe are critical to the flourishing of society. They fit into a few basic areas:

- **God: Who is God and how does He interact with us?**
Healthy people understand that God cares for them personally, that His concern is for every area of life, and that He desires their flourishing. There may be difficult days or decades, but God is still loving and present. We can find peace and hope in Him. He has good plans for us, and He invites us to be part of them.
- **Humankind: Who has value?** We flourish when we understand that *all* are made in the image of God, therefore *all* have equal value. God doesn't favor men or whites, the highly talented, the successful, or the high caste. We are also all unique. We all have different gifts, talents, and abilities that God intends us to steward wisely in order to serve our families, the church, our communities, and vulnerable people.
- **Creation: What is our relationship to it?** We are called to both rule and steward creation. We are to work and use all that God has given us to create bounty. That bounty is intended to meet our families' needs and to bless others. Resources are not limited. As we use what we have for God's glory, we will see it multiply. As we give generously, we will be blessed, so that we can be a blessing to others. We should use our God-given creativity and talents to continue the work of creation, to bring the flourishing God intended.

- **The Church: What is its role?** The Church is Christ's bride and body. It is immensely loved. It is meant to reflect Christ through its good deeds. The purpose of local churches is not only to seek the spiritual redemption of their communities, but to see God's kingdom built as all aspects of life are aligned to God's will.⁶

This list is incredibly oversimplified! Scripture is rich with too much truth to condense into just a few paragraphs. But, in our experience, when people truly believe these simple truths, it brings dramatic change.

It should also be noted that every society is built on some truths. Many African and Asian cultures have high regard for the elderly and place great value on relationship. In western societies, there is generally the truth that hard work is rewarded.

As we seek to address the lies that prevent communities from flourishing, we also want to nurture the truth that already exists and be careful not to introduce new lies. Unfortunately I have heard numerous times, "We used to serve each other in our village, then we became Christians so we stopped." The truth of Christ somehow came shackled with beliefs that ended up harming these communities. We need to recognise and celebrate the truths people already believe, making sure they don't get lost as new ideas come.

⁶ An expanded lists of biblical truths, with verse references, is included as an addendum.

Changing Beliefs

Once we have identified the beliefs that hold people back from reaching their God-given potential, we can start to bring biblical truth to counter those lies. If any of your fundamental beliefs have ever changed, you know that it's hardly a quick and simple process. Rarely does someone suggest a new idea and we immediately embrace it. It's going to take prayer, patience, time, and more prayer. However, the tools to introduce truth are relatively simple:

Teaching

Teaching is a powerful way to introduce new ideas, which starts the process of changing beliefs. In our training, we focus on bringing truth, rather than spending a lot of time focusing on lies. We believe that light will drive out darkness. For example, in our first three TCT modules, we only have one lesson out of twenty-five that is about incorrect beliefs—and even there, the main idea is to reinforce the importance of truth.

We also need to make sure the training we bring is practical. Haven't we all had this experience: We hear a sermon or attend a training; we're inspired, but, as the weeks go on, we are less sure about how to actually apply it to our daily lives? This is all the more true for many in the Majority World whose formal education (if they had any) was by rote learning. Most were never taught to wrestle with ideas and to think abstractly. As we teach, we need to both present the truth and breakdown how it impacts our lives—what we can actually do differently. If our

teaching is going to bring change, we need to help people have clear next steps to apply what they have learned.

For example, through *In His Image*, we teach the truth that all people are made in the image of God, for a purpose, and with potential. But we take it a step further. We help churches think about practical steps they can take to be involved with differently-abled people—a few simple activities they could do to get started. For example, holding a fun day for siblings who are often neglected or visiting and drinking tea with a mother who is overwhelmed and depressed.

Experience

Without divine intervention, teaching alone is rarely enough to cause long term change. In reality, we don't change our beliefs until we have actually experienced a different reality.

Ten years ago I knew I ought to exercise regularly. But, I felt too exhausted to do it. I read articles that claimed exercise would reenergise me, but still I was skeptical. However, I started to exercise and quickly discovered that it actually did give me more energy. It was my experience that changed my belief, not someone's persuasive powers. New information only served to create a willingness to try.

“ *If our teaching is going to bring change, we need to help people have clear next steps to apply what they have learned.* ”

The same is true with more significant beliefs. As I shared earlier, I truly didn't believe churches were able to move their communities out of poverty. It wasn't until I saw it actually happen that my beliefs were changed. I started a program based on ideas that resonated with me and appeared to be biblical, but I didn't truly *believe* they would work. I was ready for their failure. That's why, when the first leader told me that communities in her area had been transformed, my reaction wasn't, "Praise God!" but, "Good grief! No one even knows what we're trying to do!" However, as I heard testimonies of communities moving out of poverty, my beliefs began to change.

Those we work with are no different. They may be willing to try new actions, but they are unlikely to actually completely believe what we're teaching. Many of the lies we want to overcome are beliefs they have had their whole lives. They've never known or seen any other reality. However, as they step out and try new things, they start to see different results. Only then do their beliefs change.

To counter the belief "We can't do anything; we need someone to help us," we teach the churches to demonstrate God's love to their neighbors as an act of obedience to God. Usually the first Acts of Love they do are simple, like helping plough the field of someone too sick to do it themselves. The family they serve is saved from the financial ruin of having no harvest that year—a significant impact by any standard. However, the greater impact is on the church members

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themselves. They now have experienced that, as they work together, things change. Inspired by their experience, they often go on to do another thing, and another, and another. The belief that they are unable to do anything to change their community is replaced by a realisation that, with God's help, they can do a lot.

As we seek to bring change, we need to think about how to help people experience the impact of the truth, not just to hear it. What can they do to experience what you are teaching? If we are seeking significant change, we need to think about what a tiny, easy first step might be. In the example of the Act of Love, the challenge to the lie was indirect. We didn't challenge them to change their community, but just to love their neighbor—*that* they were willing to try. And as they did, they started to realise the capacity they had to bring change. Similarly, if we want to stretch our own beliefs (for example testing some ideas from these booklets), a small pilot project might be appropriate.

Role Models

Our experience has shown that, as one person, church, or community makes changes, others see the impact of that change and start to accept the same truths. The first person becomes a powerful example of that new idea.

In one area, I remember challenging a group of men (all church leaders) that they needed to love their wives. Their initial reaction was, "But we don't even *like* our wives." In their culture, marriages were arranged in order to have children; love was

not part of the equation. Women did all the work, getting up at 1:00 am to gather firewood and water and to prepare meals for the family. At 7:00 am, they would head to the fields. Men got up at 8:00 am and went to drink tea, doing little all day. We challenged the men that one way they could show love to their wives was to do something to help share their wife's work. The

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men were horrified. It was unheard of, and they couldn't bear the idea of the shame such activities would bring on them. However, they did want to walk out their faith and obey God, so they decided to find a way to help their wives in secret.

Eventually they landed on the plan of getting up at 4:00 am to help their wives. That way, their wives could sleep in, but the other men in the village would never know, since they would still be asleep. As it turned out, getting three extra hours of sleep and help with daily chores made their wives very happy. It didn't take long for the other men in the village to become suspicious—*Why were the marriages of the church leaders so happy now?* They investigated and found out that the women were sleeping in and the men were helping their wives with chores. They held a village meeting and decided that they would all do this!

Why did the whole community change? It wasn't a teaching. It was role models. These men who tested a new idea became examples to the whole community. When others saw the change in a few families, they decided that they wanted the same for themselves.

In His Image is another powerful example of nurturing truth through role models. It was started by a woman who has a son with autism. When he was diagnosed, she was told that there was nothing she could do but let the child live out his karma. As she visited autism centers, she discovered that they merely babysat the children, with no effort to see them develop. These centers all operated under the same lie—that children with autism have no potential. But this mother understood that people are made in the image of God, that they are precious to Him, and that He makes no mistakes. So she started a center based on these truths. This center drew attention because its students flourished far beyond their peers. Others started to ask for training and advice. The founder has now trained thousands of teachers, worked with universities to revise their curriculum, advised government agencies in reviewing their policies, and helped other centers structure their programs. Today, *In His Image* impacts far beyond the families and individuals in their own center, all because God used a small group of differently-abled children as role models to their nation.

Whether we are working with societal leaders or in communities, we need to think about how to find those who will become our first role models or early adopters. Don't be discouraged if you find yourself starting with only a few people. A few lives, powerfully changed, can be very contagious.

Testimonies and Stories

Testimonies and stories are another powerful ways to bring new ideas. While teaching does a great job of answering the *why* question, testimonies give hope. They make us believe

that change is possible. As those early adopters and role models experience changes, capturing and sharing their stories can help inspire many.

We incorporate testimony-sharing whenever our TCT leaders and trainers come together. Taking time to share testimonies serves to encourage everyone and inspire new ideas as facilitators hear about what has worked in another community. We also produce a simple magazine for the TCT churches that includes stories of Acts of Love. Many times, after the story of one church's experience has appeared in the magazine, a hundred other communities have tried the same activity. When we wrote about a community repairing a water system, for instance, hundreds more churches fixed water systems over the next few months. Stories inspired them to try things that they hadn't thought of or hadn't believed possible before.

“Only God can cause truth to penetrate hearts and minds and to transform lives.”

“While teaching does a great job of answering the why question, testimonies give hope. They make us believe that change is possible.”

We also go around the world teaching the TCT program. Without the stories of what God is doing, we would probably have a reaction very similar to the one I first had when introduced to these ideas: *If those people are right...* But now, as we share the

stories of what God is doing through His churches, people get excited and hopeful.

God's Intervention

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth - John 16:13

While you certainly can't organise it, there are many times we have seen God interrupt and bring divine revelation of a particular truth. I remember one area leader sharing that his area went through the lesson on "people are important to God." It's a one-hour lesson, with the key idea that there are some needy (like widows) in the community who might be forgotten and whom we need to care for. In this area, when asked to choose a needy group, they chose girls. When asked what they were going to do to help them, they decided that from now on girls would be educated and receive an inheritance. In the past neither had happened. Now, clearly, one hour is not enough to erase generations of gender-discrimination (our lessons just aren't that amazing, and "valuing girls" wasn't even the topic). But God turned up and revealed truth to them.

Only God can cause truth to penetrate hearts and minds and to transform lives. He's at work revealing His truth in so many ways that are outside of our control. Let's be people who are saturating our work in prayer, knowing the most powerful source of changed belief is God.

All of these work together. We need teaching to introduce new ideas. We need to challenge people to try new actions so they are able to have changed experiences. We need those early adopters who become role models—living examples to others. And we need to tell their stories far and wide. Beyond all else, we need to ask God to intervene. All of these, woven together, are effective in bringing transformation.

Who Do We Work With?

In our human wisdom, most of us believe it would be most efficient to work with people at all levels of society—impacting everyone from the government leaders to vulnerable people. But that has rarely been our experience. God typically has us work with “the least of these,” while He works on us. Only on rare occasions has God opened doors for us to work with those in power. There could be a temptation to be discouraged that we don’t seem to be affecting all of society, breaking down unjust systems, or dealing head-on with bigger issues. However, time and again, we have seen the truth of Paul’s words:

“God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

I remember early stories of government officials being frustrated with the TCT churches. One government leader complained to a local pastor, “It’s not fair. You have only been to school until grade three. I studied in university. And yet you are wiser than me. Your God keeps giving you all the answers. It just isn’t fair.” Again and again, at a local government level, we heard stories of them holding up Bibles in government offices and saying things like, “If we want to understand why the communities all changed, we need to read this book—it has the answers.” As they saw the wisdom and influence God had given His churches, the government started to come to them for advice about community programs and even gave them a voice in influencing local policy.

As mentioned earlier, *In His Image* is one program that *has* had opportunities to speak into policies and to influence those in authority. But it started with years of laboring with 30-40 children with autism—certainly one of the most vulnerable and looked-down-upon groups in India. Many of these children are never let outside; they’re considered the result of a curse on their family. But as this small group of children flourished and progressed, universities, large organizations, and even national governments began to notice the difference and invite the director’s input.

As God has brought change amongst the most vulnerable people, everyone from government leaders to scholars have been humbled. Communities of poor, uneducated, minority people...children with autism from low-income families—these have been God’s chosen instruments to teach truth to those who shape policy and to cause them to act more justly.

Conclusion

Beliefs shape the lives of vulnerable people (and all of us). The lies that are believed by the vulnerable, by society, and by those who seek to respond, all work together to create a web that locks people into all kinds of brokenness. However, God has promised us that the truth will set us free. As people seeking to address the brokenness we see around us, we ourselves need truth. We also need to bring truth to those we serve and to those who are creating the systems around them.

ADDENDUM 1

REFLECT AND APPLY

Anna describes her work in development as having helped some people, but as not exactly transformational. As you reflect on your own experiences, who have you seen helped? What about transformation—a complete and irreversible change to “fullness of life”—have you seen that kind of impact? If so, what do you think brought it about? If not, why not?

Page 3 states: *Unless we identify the beliefs impacting those we work with and bring truth to counter lies, we will not see lives transformed.*

Do you believe this statement to be true? Why or why not?

What lies—about God, themselves, and creation—can you identify among the people you are seeking to serve?

How could you go about identifying more lies that have trapped them? What questions might you ask?

What about at the society-level? As you think about the systems and customs in the country where you work, where are the areas of brokenness? What lies might undergird them?

Did you relate to any of Anna's early experiences working among vulnerable people? Have you made some of the same mistakes?

Spend some time in prayer and reflection, asking God to show you what you really believe about vulnerable people, yourself, and Him. Are those beliefs aligned with biblical truth?

Look back over the 'key truths' on page 19. Are there any that don't align with your experience or understanding of Scripture? If so, list them here. We encourage you to search Scripture and ask God to reveal what He wants you to know about these ideas.

What could you do to test these ideas in your own life and work?

Now look at the 'key truths' that you can easily agree with. Considering your behavior, would an outsider guess that you believe these things? Ask God to show you any areas of inconsistency, and what they may reveal about your beliefs.

Considering their choices and actions, do the people you seek to serve know and apply each of these biblical truths? Where does their understanding seem to be lacking?

List some ways you could bring these truths through teaching, role models, and testimonies.

What would have to happen for the people you work with to begin applying these truths in their daily lives? What can they do to experience what you are teaching?

Page 28 gives this challenges: *Let's be people who are saturating our work in prayer, knowing the most powerful source of changed belief is God.* What would it look like to "saturate your work in prayer"?

ADDENDUM 2

BIBLICAL TRUTHS

Some of the core truths that we have seen bring positive change in communities are:

God created all things and rules over all things. Therefore, we acknowledge His Lordship over all things and seek to walk in obedience to all His commands. We do not need to be fearful of any other spirits, because we know that God is greater than anything else. Jeremiah 32:17, Psalm 147:5

God has a good plan, and we have a purpose in that plan. Therefore we can make choices that impact our future and help to bring about God's good purposes for this world. Romans 8:28, Jeremiah 5:1, Luke 11:9, Exodus 32:9-14.

His redemptive plan covers all areas of life. Because Jesus died to reconcile all things that were broken through the fall, we know that His concern is not only for 'spiritual' things or personal morality, but for every aspect of life. Colossians 1:15-20

The Church, as the body of Christ, is called to be an agent of reconciliation. Therefore, we are commanded to do good works, which bring glory to God and healing to brokenness. 2 Corinthians 5:18, Ephesians 2:10, Matthew 5:13-16.

Humanity

Humans are created in the image of God. Every person has inherent worth. We are all equally valuable and loved by our Creator. Genesis 1:27, Psalm 139:13-16, Colossians 3:11.

We are to use what we have to build God's kingdom, to bless others, and to bring glory to God. Each of us have unique gifts, talents, and resources. 1 Corinthians 12, 2 Corinthians 9:11.

Creation

Humankind stewards creation. Creation does not belong to us. It is God's. However, we have been called to care for and protect creation. As the result of our lives, creation should be left better off than when we found it. Genesis 2:15, Psalm 24:1.

Bounty is to be created and stewarded.

Work is both good and required. What we produce should be stewarded carefully and used to care for our families and build God's kingdom. Micah 3:10, Matthew 25:14-30, 1 Timothy 5:8, Deuteronomy 14:18-29.



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