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# WALKING THE TALK

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It's yet another day, and another busy week. My heart keeps beating with the promise God has for His people. I have been reflecting on God's purpose for humanity, looking at how past events, the steps we take today, and the steps we will take in the near future help shape our existence. What makes us do the things we do?

Economics tell us that individuals are driven by their own interests. Recently I had a brief debate with a professor of economics at the University of Nairobi. I informed him that Jesus Christ was the best economist that ever lived. The professor responded with a question: "How can a man who fed a multitude be an economist? He gave out hand outs".

Why *did* Jesus respond as he did to the multitude? Jesus' own disciples doubted there was any way they could make a difference, and yet Jesus chose to face the crowd with compassion, and generosity.

We could ask ourselves the same thing in the face of HIV and AIDS: How can we possibly make a difference for the 28 million people in sub Saharan Africa? Maybe a glimmer of hope will help...

An article by PLUSNEWS stated that there are currently more mothers and children in developing countries receiving treatment for HIV and AIDS than there were in previous years. When I read this my heart was filled with joy! Oppressive cultural practices and inequality in resource allocation – such as business loans, employment, and education – all contribute to the vulnerability of girls and women, and yet many were finally getting the treatment they need.

I am thankful to God that another person with HIV is on life-saving antiretroviral drugs (ARVs). I am thankful that another mother is healthy enough to spend more time with her children. I am thankful that another child will go to bed tonight with a full tummy after enjoying his mother's cooking of a nutritious Amaranth Chapati meal. I am thankful that a mother will educate her four beautiful daughters on the modes of transmission and prevention of HIV. I am thankful that a person with disabilities and HIV positive can hold her head up now that she has gained back 20 kg, and that she can once again run her income generating kiosk on a regular basis.

Despite these blessings, the multitude of people infected with, and affected by HIV and AIDS still exists. Millions of women, men and children require ARVs. Stigma and discrimination continues to be problem, even more so within the church. But we can make a difference as youth, pastors, deacons and most importantly as the Body of Christ.

And now I end by quoting a portion of a letter from my spiritual father Larry McAuley, CRWRC country consultant in Malawi:

**HIV+ people are not sinners.** I think the pastor (that said this) is saying that people living with HIV and AIDS aren't sick BECAUSE they sinned. But we need to be careful that it is because of sin that they are sick. Sickness is in the world because of all of our cumulative sin and rebellion against God. Some who have AIDS are sick because they chose to engage in risky sex. Some who have AIDS got it from others through no sinful choice of their own. ALL who have AIDS are sinners -- just as are ALL who don't have AIDS!!! We ALL stand in need of God's grace and the forgiveness we receive only by trusting the finished work of Jesus on our behalf! Reducing stigma is a tight-rope act -- we can fall off on either side of the rope! Either we err on the side of judgment, or we err on the side of saying AIDS is like any other virus, that we are all at risk, and there is absolutely no moral issue at all in the spread of AIDS. The balance is to recognize that SOME have AIDS and spread AIDS by engaging in sinful behavior. But that all of us, regardless of viral load or lack thereof are sinners in need of God's grace and forgiveness. When folks are struck down by AIDS, we must not condemn them for their part in contracting or spreading the disease, but must serve them with love and mercy recognizing that we, too, are infected with the virus of SIN and are under the judgment of death for this -- except for the forgiveness of Christ purchased for us at the cost of His life! My goal here is not to sound judgmental but realistic -- in the need for being truthful about where AIDS comes from, in the need to express love and mercy to all who are infected and affected, and in the need we ALL have for forgiveness.

Grace and peace,

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