



A G-Rated Ministry in an R-Rated World

By Richard Stearns

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As the brand-new president of World Vision U.S., when I returned from Rakai, Uganda in August 1998, after that first encounter with the AIDS pandemic, I was both heartbroken and angry that the world was not doing enough to help. I began to ask questions all around World Vision about what we were doing to care for the orphans and widows and how we planned to battle this terrible disease.

I can remember distinctly the discomfort in the room as I brought together some of our marketing people and tried to marshal cooperation to raise both awareness and money in our donor community. Finally some spoke up and said, "We're a G-rated ministry focused on children and families. AIDS is an R-rated issue. I don't think our donors are going to be willing to give for this, and if we push too hard, it could hurt our reputation." There. It was on the table. We conducted a research study to ask real people to tell us how they actually felt about this issue. The results?

Sadly, virtually every other demographic group we surveyed, including non-Christians, showed a greater willingness to help than evangelical Christians. When it came to showing compassion to AIDS victims, culture blindness obscured our sins of apathy and judgment, just as it blinded Christians in previous generations to slavery and racism.

Speaking of the blindness of the religious leaders of His day, Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah in the Book of Matthew, chapter 13, verses 13-15. Perhaps every pastor, church leader, and parachurch ministry leader should begin their daily devotions with a prayer that God would open their eyes to their own blind spots so they can lead their congregations through the strong currents of our secular culture. We must also listen to the prophetic voices both within and outside of our churches. Bono, Tutu, MLK, Mother Teresa and many, many others have all spoken prophetically to the Church. We need to pay heed.

Excerpted from "The Hole in our Gospel," by Richard Stearns (Thomas Nelson, 2009), chapter 17, pages 194-198. Ten years later, Stearns and World Vision are leading the charge to turn the tide on the HIV and AIDS pandemic, while serving the needs of widows and orphans in AIDS-impacted communities worldwide.