

# Current Thoughts

from Dwight's corner

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A few weeks ago Max and I attended the Leadership Summit at Willow Creek. As always we learned a lot (and were reminded of a lot) that impacts the way we work with churches and pastors in the Great Rivers Region.

I was especially looking forward to this Summit because it featured an exclusive video interview with Bono. Bono is the lead singer of the Irish rock and roll band, **U2**. I “discovered” **U2** with their 1987 album **The Joshua Tree**. In particular, the song “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” with its poignant mix of holy discontent and hope latched onto my soul.

Bono resists being called a Christian (he says “I am a c\*\*\*\* disciple.”) His lifestyle is offensive to many. He is vocal in his frustration, even anger, over the Church. I can’t endorse either him or the band as paragons of Christian discipleship, but it is impossible to listen to his songs and not hear the persistent rhythm of the Gospel and a deep longing underneath it all. (You might find **Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2** by Steve Stockman interesting).

Bono recently emerged on the public policy stage, meeting with world leaders to urge responses to global humanitarian crises. But for years both he and the band have been incredibly generous with both their treasure and their time, working quietly on things consistent with the Gospel rhythm in their music. They have steadfastly refused to make their generosity public knowledge, fearing that it would be interpreted as a publicity stunt or, even worse, that it would undermine their own motives. (Frankly, I think that is unfortunate—we could use some examples of extraordinary generosity; we see more than enough of greed and self-centeredness.) Bono and his wife had worked as volunteers in an African HIV/AIDS camp. That brings me to the point (finally).

Speaking of the global HIV/AIDS reality in general and the African situation in particular, Bono said “It is the humanitarian crisis of our age.” From sheer numbers, it might well qualify as the humanitarian crisis of human history.

There are **12 million children** in Africa who are orphans because of AIDS. Most are themselves infected with HIV. There can be no doubt that these children are victims; victims of sometimes ignorant, sometimes immoral, sometimes violent choices by adults. We can victimize them again by choosing to look away. The situation is complicated by the extreme poverty of the region, ignorance, government corruption, and unchecked “militias” in a culture of violence. Indeed, the crisis so massive that it is overwhelming. At the same time, there are unprecedented opportunities (both secular and religious) to respond. It is a question of will.

*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:15-17)*

*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father ... For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I need clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* (Matthew 25:34-36)

I am not suggesting that innocent victims of AIDS live only in Africa; I am trying to shine a light on a crisis of staggering proportions. I challenge you to learn and respond.

Check out World Vision International. ([www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org)), especially check out the "aids experience" multimedia presentation at the bottom of the web page. This presentation was onsite at Willow Creek Summit). World Vision is a Christian relief and development organization dedicated to helping children and their communities worldwide reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty. World Vision serves the poor regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender in more than 90 countries around the world, including 26 in Africa. During the Summit, Rich Stearns, President of World Vision issued a \$100,000 challenge to any church for a creative, courageous response to the AIDS crisis.

Check out World Relief ([www.worldrelief.org](http://www.worldrelief.org) click "What We Do" under "Our Work," then click "AIDS Ministries"). This is the relief and development arm of the National Association of Evangelicals. It works in the United States and in 24 countries around the world to create sustainable solutions for the desperately poor.

Check out Family Health International ([www.fhi.org](http://www.fhi.org)). Family Health International implements HIV prevention, care, and treatment programs in 60 developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. They partner with community and faith-based organizations and governments. Their resource materials include specific tools to address the health needs of children, especially those orphaned by AIDS.

Check out Firelight Foundation ([www.firelightfoundation.org](http://www.firelightfoundation.org)). The mission of the Firelight Foundation is to support and advocate for the needs and rights of children who are orphaned or affected by HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through grants and educational materials they provide resources to grassroots organizations that are strengthening the capacity of families and communities to care for children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS.

