



Week Four: Educational Inequalities

At a time when education is rapidly becoming a prerequisite for human survival, nearly one billion people have entered the 21st century unable to read their own names; 544 million of them are women. This fact is an atrocity considering that less than 1% of the money spent internationally on weapons of war each year could educate every child on earth.



MONDAY

Destroyed for lack of knowledge

Reflect

But don't look for someone to blame.

No finger pointing!

You, priest, are the one in the dock.

You stumble around in broad daylight,

And then the prophets take over and stumble all night.

Your mother is as bad as you.

My people are ruined

because they don't know what's right or true.

Because you've turned your back on knowledge,

I've turned my back on you priests.

Because you refuse to recognize the revelation of God,

I'm no longer recognizing your children.

The more priests, the more sin.

They traded in their glory for shame.

Hosea 4.4-7 |MSG

Receive

Today one in six adults in the world is illiterate, and two-thirds of them are women. And the picture for the world's future adults doesn't look any better. There are 115 million children who do not attend primary school. In Africa, only 59 percent attend school at all, and only one in three will complete primary school. The reasons children do not attend school are many. For some, their families need them to work – fetching water, farming, or even working in bonded labor to pay off a debt. Others have to stay at home to care for a sick parent, particularly in regions where AIDS is rampant. Girls are often thought to not need an education and are kept home to do domestic work. And poor governments do not always provide schools in every district or may face a serious shortage of teachers. Education is foundational to the development of a child, his or her community, and the entire nation, and no long term escape from poverty is possible without the methodical and routine education of children – both boys and girls.

Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*

I am illiterate. I am like a blind person. (*An illiterate mother in Pakistan*)

“My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge” (Hos.4:6).

The priest in ancient Hebrew culture had a two-directional task: Bring the people to God through sacrifice and meaningful, sacred ritual, and bring God to the people through *education* in the teachings delivered to them through Moses. As has happened too much in the history of all organized religion, the first task of sacrifice and ritual was embraced and the second task of education was reduced to not much more than needed programming to sustain the regular institutional sacrifice and ritual. God's heart for education in that culture was to lead the people out of the ignorance of their own past as well that of their surrounding culture and into a practical, deepening knowledge of God himself and of his ways of doing this thing called "life." Education, therefore, ranged from how they farmed, to how they ate, to how they prevented diseases, to how they raised their children.

And it was an epic failure.

The rather bleak picture painted for us above tells us in no uncertain terms that the epic failure in education isn't limited to ancient times and spaces. In this digital, online, high-speed connection-age the great disconnect in education continues, leaving us with the same choice faced by ancient Hebrew priests.

We can draw lines between the secular and sacred, limiting our spiritual growth to training times at church on Sunday. But then we risk falling into the same trap as the priests: getting to check it off our lists but failing to get the heart of it. God's heart is, and always has been, for total transformation... not pious offerings, but *hearts* of sacrifice and obedience to him. We are called to live out our faith in every aspect of our lives: at our businesses, our schools, in our neighborhoods, on Facebook, through our food and exercise, and when no one is watching. When we start looking for the Spirit's movement throughout the day and asking for our flesh to die and our spirit to live, we start to see him transform us and give us a voice that sings in harmony with his.

This is also a purpose of education. It helps human beings to find – and use – their voice. It is significant that the Hebrew word translated "destroyed" in Hosea 4.6 literally means "to silence", which is the opposite of God's purpose (i.e., "My people are silenced by a lack of knowledge"). To be educated is to see one's own voice discovered and amplified. Kingdom people are upstream-moving people who help the voiceless to find their voice. We are educators and amplifiers for a humanity whose voice is waiting to be heard.

All we need is somewhere to get started . . . and someone to get started with . . .

Relate

How is your heart being stirred to help the voiceless to find their voice? Where is your "somewhere" and who is your "someone" for you to get started dispelling the darkness of ignorance and turning on the light of knowledge in creative, life-giving ways?

Respond

"And they shall all be taught of God" (Jn.6:45 NASB; and/or Is.54:13) *Use me, Father, to make that vision reality; to be an instrument of education leading to true, life-giving knowledge filling the earth as waters cover the sea... out of your mercy, Jesus!*

TUESDAY

Give those minds a compass

Reflect

Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and on your city gates.

Deuteronomy 6.6-9 |MSG

One day children were brought to Jesus in the hope that he would lay hands on them and pray over them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus intervened: "Let the children alone, don't prevent them from coming to me. God's kingdom is made up of people like these."

Matthew 19.13-14 |MSG

Receive

Principal Jacobs: Mr. Holland! Just the man I was looking for. We're forming a textbook committee for next year's curriculum. And I would like to have your ideas and suggestions. We meet next Tuesday night in the library.

Glenn Holland: Oh, I'm sorry, Mrs. Jacobs. I'm... I'm very busy on Tuesday night.

Principal Jacobs: Uh-huh. You know, for a good four or five months now, I've been watching you,

Mr. Holland. I've never seen a teacher sprint for the parking lot after last period with more speed and enthusiasm than his students. Perhaps you should be our track coach.

Glenn Holland: Mrs. Jacobs, I get here on time every morning, don't I? I'm doing my job the best I can.

Principal Jacobs: A teacher is two jobs. Fill young minds with knowledge, yes. But more important, give those minds a compass so that that knowledge doesn't go to waste. Now, I don't know what you're doing with the knowledge, Mr. Holland, but as a compass, you're stuck.

Mr. Holland's Opus

Ipsa scientia potestas est. "Knowledge itself is power."

Meditationes Sacrae, Francis Bacon (1597)

We tend to associate education with classrooms and rows of chairs, with lesson plans and test results, with homework and assignments. Most of this is modern structure relating to the first job of the teacher: filling young minds with knowledge. But as is so wisely (and annoyingly) pointed out by Principal Jacobs to the reluctant, fledging Mr. Holland, the more important task of the educator in any setting, on any level, is this: "giving those minds a compass so that knowledge doesn't go to waste." There is no factual, ordered, methodic installation of such a compass; it is only relationally *instilled*.

So we see with Moses' foundational instruction to parents; it wasn't so much about a data download at an appointed time. It was about the passing of knowledge and experience, through time leisurely spent together in the course of a normal day. "Leisure" is in fact the original meaning of the Greek word σχολή (sko-LAY) from which we get our word "school." In Greek culture *scholē* was anywhere leisure and loitering were to be found and welcomed. In other words, it was a *hang-out*. It was low on the informational agenda, high on the relational agenda. Teachers sat with students, who sat in a

circle around them. And they were frequently mobile – in both Greek and Jewish cultures. They experienced the sights and sounds of life in the “classroom of the world” as the teacher passed on his wisdom and insights, and the students questioned him and debated amongst themselves. It was a leisurely instilling of a relational and moral compass, over time; thus the “student became as his teacher.”

Moses’ instructions also indicate that teaching and parenting should be intentional and involve a variety of relevant learning styles. The children weren’t only expected to sit and listen to the law, but they saw it on the wall, they wore it on their bodies, they talked about it with their parents, and they visually saw it every time they entered or exited their home. God wanted parents to be persistent until the children got it! It was an urgent matter ... this generation of Israelites must know who God is and how to live! True learning and understanding wouldn’t happen if the parents limited that learning time to religious ceremonies. It was to be a way of life ... repetitive, relevant, persistent, and intentionally harmonizing the truths of the scripture with the rhythms of life.

How did Jesus model this? Jesus invited twelve men, evidently all but one of them from the lower-ranked, uneducated Galileans (Judas Iscariot is thought to be the only “smart” one among them, from the more sophisticated southern Judea, rather than the more rural and uneducated northern Galilee). He called them to be *with* him. So, here is our basic model for the teacher-student relationship, as spoken to the teacher: Go to the dark places, to “the land of the shadow of death” and invite those on whom the world has given up, who have given up on themselves, and invite them to be *with* you. Walk with them and let them walk with you. Let the knowledge flow and the relational-compass-instilling commence. And be prepared to see that circle widen right along with their eyes.

Jesus opened his circle to the prime examples of the least, the lost, and the last in his culture: he opened it wide to receive the children that his disciples would shoo.

Oh, yes, be prepared to see this circle widen. . .

Relate

What does education/ discipleship look like in your home? Have you had a good model in your life of someone who walked with you and taught you relevant truth? Are you mentoring anyone by walking with them now? Are you providing them knowledge and a compass?

God cares about us really learning and getting the truth for our own lives. He cares about all people getting opportunities to learn... young, old, male, female, Jew, Gentile, etc. He wants us to have those same opportunities and extend them to others. So many people in poverty miss the opportunity of receiving education, especially women and children. Do you have a need in your own neighborhood community for literacy programs and mentoring? What about other nations?

Respond

My rabbi, my Jesus, help me to continue learning your truths through relationship with you. Let me be intentional to renew my mind each day in relevant ways that are just part of my daily life. Show me how to creatively teach others to live in your transforming power. And help me to see out into my community and beyond, to the last, the least, and the lost: the people who need mentoring, tutoring, knowledge and a compass to guide their lives in your footsteps...through you, Jesus!

Get familiar with some programs in your own community that reach out to at-risk youth and provide mentoring or tutoring. The church has an opportunity to love on these kids and show them that they are not invisible to God.

Focus on your own parenting or offer to teach parenting classes (often needed at jails, shelters, etc.) Volunteer for your own church’s children’s ministry or youth ministry and relationally invest into the kids’ lives during these most receptive years of their lives. Use creativity to help them really get it!

W E D N E S D A Y

Let the women learn

Reflect

³⁸⁻⁴⁰ As they continued their travel, Jesus entered a village. A woman by the name of Martha welcomed him and made him feel quite at home. She had a sister, Mary, who sat before the Master, hanging on every word he said. But Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen.

Later, she stepped in, interrupting them.

“Master, don’t you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand.”

⁴¹⁻⁴² The Master said, “Martha, dear Martha, you’re fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it— it’s the main course, and won’t be taken from her.”

Luke 10.38-40 |MSG

Receive

The single most important thing that can be done to cure extreme poverty is this: protect, educate, and nurture girls and women, and provide them with equal rights and opportunities – educationally, economically, and socially. There is a saying in many parts of Africa: “If you educate a man, you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a nation.” When a girl is educated, her income potential increases, maternal and infant mortality are reduced, children are more likely to be immunized, the birth rate decreases, and the percentage of HIV infections (especially in Africa) is lowered. An educated girl is more likely to acquire skills to improve the economic stability of her family, and she is more apt to ensure that her daughters receive an education too. Educating girls pays dividend after dividend to the whole community.

Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*

Let the women learn. the Apostle Paul

We tend to focus on Jesus choosing twelve men to be his disciples/students. Of course, we also typically think of them as white men, rather than olive-skinned, Arab-looking, Mediterranean types (at least white people like me do). Then we bolster and cement that narrow circle of participation in education on both the giving and receiving end by quoting expostulatory injunctions for “women to keep silent” and interpreting that as a fundamental gender exclusion in education: thus, we send the women away.

But in so doing, we miss Jesus’s revolutionary “widening of the circle.” Yes, ancient culture was heavily patriarchal. Yes, in Jewish culture women were literally veiled – personally and institutionally in the synagogues. Women and children both were separated by a corporate veil behind which they were neither seen nor heard, as men engaged in the process of prayer and debate, reading and recitation. But in Christ we see the circle widening. In come the children. And in come the women. In his ministry, Jesus continually pulls down the curtain that separated the genders, and suddenly, Mary is sitting with the men at the feet of Jesus as a student. And Jesus defends her place and value there, calling it the better part “that would not be taken from her.” And so a woman finds her place in the circle of students who would aim to become *as* their teacher. We focus on the meaning of “I don’t allow her to teach” while ignoring

the far-reaching, radical implications of “let a woman learn.” As he invited a widening circle, our Teacher instilled a moral compass that has continued to do its work among his students.

The question is will we remain stuck?

Will we watch as the world remains stuck?

Or will we, the professed students of Christ, embrace such a widening circle of education and learning in our world and give our all to find creative ways to see it realized in our generation?

Relate

How have you seen the vulnerable lack educational opportunities? (Women, children, disabled, elderly, immigrants, etc.) What would God’s heart be for them? How can you and/or your church help change the tide and foster educational opportunities by widening the circle?

Respond

Father, help me to be part of your redemptive plan by showing each and every person that they have value to you and are worthy of the same opportunities and hope that the privileged have. Show me where I may be part of the problem and help me see practical ways for reaching out to those who have been forgotten or neglected. All because it’s your heart and your mission, Jesus!

Show value to the women in your life today.

Reach out to those God has put on your heart ... those marginalized who just need a hand of hope from you.

Watch the movie “Malala”, which tells the true story of a girl who was shot for going to school

THURSDAY

The long game

Reflect

Moses wrote out this Revelation and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the Chest of the Covenant of God, and to all the leaders of Israel. And he gave these orders: “At the end of every seven years, the Year-All-Debts-Are-Canceled, during the pilgrim Festival of Booths when everyone in Israel comes to appear in the Presence of God, your God, at the place he designates,

read out this Revelation to all Israel,
with everyone listening.

Gather the people together

—men, women, children, and the foreigners living among you—
so they can listen well,

so they may learn to live in holy awe before God, your God,
and diligently keep everything in this Revelation.

And do this so that their children, who don't yet know all this,
will also listen and learn to live in holy awe before God, your God,
for as long as you live on the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to possess.”

Deuteronomy 31.9-13 |MSG

Receive

To “play the long game” means not to worry too much about immediate results, but to work patiently toward a particular end over a long period of time. Each significant task we choose to work on connects to the bigger picture. Instead of asking how much something matters, we ask how *long* it matters. That's not a bad way to think about education. The short game of most American colleges might be about preparing students for the exigencies of the market or doing research that will be of immediate benefit to many people. But what is the long game of a liberal arts education like Wyoming Catholic College's? What kinds of things will matter as much a thousand years from now as they do now – or as they did two or three thousand years ago?

Joseph Pearce, from his blog article *What Does Golf Have to Do with Education?*

When it comes to the process of education or to solving issues of educational inequalities and illiteracy – or moving to solve any problems on the world stage as we continue moving upstream, the temptation is to gravitate towards microwaved or Crock Pot solutions world. The process of the restoration of all things – including ourselves! – is not a one-time, immediate fix. The world is in the process of being mended even as we are being healed/mended, too.

Ancient culture was not a literate culture in which the task of education was to teach everyone to read and send them home with a book to study. They were an oral culture in which education occurred over time as information was conveyed and the inner compass instilled individually at home as they “sat down and rose up and walked along the way” and corporately as all the tribes gathered to hear together the reading of the law. At least that was the divine intent. Judging from our opening word from Hosea this week (“My people are destroyed through lack of knowledge”) it didn't quite work out that way. In fact it was such an epic failure that the divine library itself was lost amidst the accumulated layers of the temple storage rooms. They became stuck in more ways than one. But the plan was for a periodic soaking in the words of God that everyone in society was exposed to, which each household was intended to take with them in

their hearts and minds as they returned home – until the next seventh-year-soaking.

Education is a long game.

It's not how much it matters; it's how long it matters.

And so Jesus chose his students that they might be with him, and then he essentially walked in a Galilean circle (“Galilee” actually means “circle”) for a year or more, making the rounds from Capernaum to Chorazin, to Bethsaida. His classroom was the countryside and his lessons were found in daily encounters with the sick, with foreigners, with the birds of the air and with the flowers of the field. Jesus played the long game rather than looking for the slam dunk.

So let's review the Jesus education path once more: find a dark place, invite those on whom the world has given up and who have given up on themselves, invite them to be *with* you. Walk with them and let them walk with you. Let the knowledge flow and the relational-compass-instilling commence. Play the long game.

The question is, are *you* game?

Relate

If you were to take a step back and look at the big picture of your life and where you are headed, are there areas of your life where you find yourself short-sighted, focusing on the here-and-now and losing sight of the big picture or long-term effects? How is God calling you to play the long game?

How might you go “upstream” in your ministry opportunities so that you can leave an even bigger impact in the end?

What do you want your legacy to be?

Respond

Help me Spirit, to know how to be intentional and purposeful, instead of reacting to whatever circumstance is around me. Help me to live out your wisdom and I pray, Jesus, that you will move through me to leave a bigger imprint on the world than I could ever imagine. Make my life count, Lord!

Who are you passing it on to? Every season of life presents opportunities for mentoring the younger generation. Who has God brought to you? If no one, who might be in need of someone to walk with them during this phase of life? Pray about it and reach out to them if the Lord leads you in that way.

How could you double or triple the scope of your ministry impact? Think about how to go “upstream” so that you may address the root causes of depravity. Write out an action plan and commit to prayer.

Write out a description of what you want your legacy to be.

FRIDAY

We are your symphony

Reflect

When I was a boy at my father's knee,
the pride and joy of my mother,
He would sit me down and drill me:
"Take this to heart. Do what I tell you—live!
Sell everything and buy Wisdom! Forage for Understanding!
Don't forget one word! Don't deviate an inch!
Never walk away from Wisdom—she guards your life;
love her—she keeps her eye on you.
Above all and before all, do this: Get Wisdom!
Write this at the top of your list: Get Understanding!
Throw your arms around her—believe me, you won't regret it;
never let her go—she'll make your life glorious.
She'll garland your life with grace,
she'll festoon your days with beauty.

Proverbs 4.3-9 |MSG

Receive

Adult Gertrude Lang: Mr. Holland had a profound influence on my life and on a lot of lives I know. But I have a feeling that he considers a great part of his own life misspent. Rumor had it he was always working on this symphony of his. And this was going to make him famous, rich, probably both. But Mr. Holland isn't rich and he isn't famous, at least not outside of our little town. So it might be easy for him to think himself a failure. But he would be wrong, because I think that he's achieved a success far beyond riches and fame. Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched, and each of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. We are the music of your life.

Mr. Holland's Opus

The fact that education is a "long game" by its very nature means that the "payoff," the tangible results, the real difference made, can be obscured. It's been observed that the will of God is seldom known in prospect but usually only in retrospect. The same may be said about seeing the hands-on difference we have made. We do so much instilling and then the now-present faces are gone, soon replaced by other, fresher faces as life continues its relentless rotation. So we instill, instill, instill . . .and then wonder if any of its making a difference.

Jesus walked in circles for three years with his band of learners. What did he see in terms of difference? On his last night with them, there was no Gertrude Lang thanking him for the incredible difference he had made in his life. But there was a debate among his students as to which of them was the greatest. The "teacher's pet" conspired to betray him for a paltry sum. As he faced the greatest inner turmoil of his life, his students fell asleep. And when he was arrested every last one of them ran, and most of them didn't stop for at least three days.

Not exactly a symphony.

I wonder how much the sage who now reflects on those meaningful moments with an instructing father and a nurturing mother as they urged him to “sell everything and get wisdom and buy understanding” was bored and annoyed at the time.

Education is a long term, long game path. Any life and ministry that matters is a long term, long game path. Our “opus”, the symphony of our life is composed over a lifetime in meaningful encounters, in persistently offered presence, in repeated soakings, which is why Paul offers his students such works of encouragement as these:

With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.

I Corinthians 15.58 |MSG

Perhaps that's what heaven will really be for us after the long game of life: it will be the moment when we finally, *finally* get to hear the symphony of our lives, hear those notes resonating together in harmony that have been scattered across the field of our existence. Perhaps faith is simply trusting that there is a symphony salvaged out of all this; a symphony that will be heard, made up of meaningful but mundane notes and chords stuck in the here and now.

If so, faith utters a very simple word in the ear of each of us: *Play*.

Relate

Be encouraged! Sometimes in the midst of the music, we don't hear what others hear. We can hear our own mistakes and our missing rhythms. But Jesus conducts the symphony of our lives to make beautiful music that brings glory to God. Reflect on past ways that God has been faithful to you in bringing good out of tragedy, beauty out of our shortcomings, masterfully showing us individual love and value, while creating a masterpiece through the larger body for eternal glory. He is the source of all wisdom and understanding.

How have you pursued wisdom and understanding in your life? Has it been important to you? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. What does it look like to fear the Lord while trusting him and playing the notes he teaches you to play?

Respond

Lord, let me see what you see of my own life and the lives of others. Let me hear phrases of the symphony you have ordained since the beginning of the world and fill me with hope and trust in you as my conductor. Let me be a sweet sound to your ears and the ears of others, playing in harmony with your spirit. I ask for your wisdom and understanding to trust you and follow you all the days of my life.

He longs to give us wisdom and understanding of who he is and how to reflect him in this life. Be courageous to continue praying for your own wisdom from the Lord, ask for prayer from others, and intercede for someone who is in desperate need of God's intervention and wisdom in their life.

Follow Jesus and Mr. Holland's example: Call out the best in the people whom God brings to you and see Him orchestrate a symphony that will outlast time.