

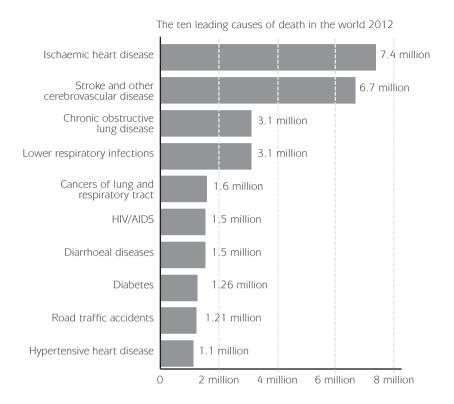
GLOBAL HEALTH WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion. (Isaiah 61:1–3)

eath and disease are universal human problems but, in the developing world especially, many people suffer and die from illnesses or injuries that are easily preventable or curable.

In a world where technology and the mixing of populations have removed many physical and cultural barriers, what responsibility do we have as Christians for those in other countries? In what sense are those in need in other countries our neighbours? Should Christians be concerned about global health?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 56 million people died in 2012 worldwide. ¹ WHO lists the top ten killers worldwide as follows:



Of course the distribution of various causes of deaths is different in different countries.

A world of two halves

In high-income countries more than two thirds of all people live beyond the age of 70 and predominantly die of chronic diseases: heart disease, strokes, chronic obstructive lung disease, cancers, diabetes or dementia. But in low-income countries, only one in five of all people reach the age of 70, and more than a third of all deaths are among children under 15. People predominantly die of infectious diseases: lung infections, diarrhoeal diseases, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Complications of pregnancy and childbirth together continue to be leading causes of death, claiming the lives of both

infants and mothers. 6.6 million deaths in 2012 were among children under five years of age, and 99% of them were in low and middle-income countries.

Tobacco use is a major cause of many of the world's top killer diseases in both rich and poor countries – including cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive lung disease and lung cancer. In total, tobacco use is responsible for the death of almost one in ten adults worldwide – that's 5.6 million per year. Smoking is often the hidden cause of the disease recorded as being responsible for death. But tobacco is not actually the biggest secondary cause of death. In general terms, people in high-income countries die of diseases related to wealth and those in low income countries die from those related to poverty.

Every Christian who cares about human rights should be aware of the effects of poverty on the world's most vulnerable people. Christians must be concerned for vulnerable people – whether they are children on a garbage heap in a developing world city or defenceless babies in the womb. Both are equally important to God.

Jesus the great physician

But before we even begin to think about how we respond as Christians to global health needs, we need to set the problem within the context of God's plan for the world that we considered in the Prologue. It is essential that we understand Jesus Christ's mission of salvation before we ask how health fits into it. Jesus' dynamic entry into first century Judea was marked by miraculous healing of many illnesses for which even today there are no known treatments. However, the ultimate aim of his ministry was not to empty hospitals, but to empty graveyards. Once we have rightly understood Jesus' priority we are ready to consider how global health fits into his plan.

Luke, writer of Luke and Acts and probably the first-ever Christian doctor, tells us that Jesus sent his followers out 'to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick' (Luke 9:2). Right from the

beginning, Christ's ministry to the spirit and ministry to the body have gone hand in hand. For the last 2,000 years, Christian doctors and nurses have been inspired by the example and teaching of Jesus, leading them to the forefront of efforts to alleviate human suffering, cure disease, and advance knowledge and understanding. Many of medicine's pioneers were men and women who had deep Christian faith.

In the twenty-first century, Christian health professionals, and particularly doctors, have a passport to work in countries that those of many other professions, including pastors, do not. But what is their mandate and what should be their priorities in playing a part in fulfilling Jesus' great commission? Jesus' Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4 outlines his priorities. We are told that when standing to read in the synagogue on the Sabbath in his home town, Jesus was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and 'found the place where it is written':

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4:18–19)

Stuart was a wealthy lawyer who went on an overseas trip with a team from his church to a developing country where he met a local doctor who was working alongside churches, equipping them to do basic healthcare and develop microfinance projects and women's literacy. Amazed at what God was doing for such little cost he re-evaluated his giving priorities and helped to set up a UK-based charity to raise money tax-effectively to support the work. Not only did this bring great benefit to a church ministry in another country but also helped to save Stuart from spending his money on luxury and consumer items that would not have been helpful for his own walk with God.

The Jewish listeners would have recognised this quote from Isaiah 61, which actually ends, 'And the day of vengeance of our God' (Isaiah 61:1–2). Jesus stopped mid-verse, presumably to illustrate that redemption and judgment were going to be separated in history. Judgment would be delayed in order to allow people time to repent.

The manifesto opens with the words, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me...'. Elsewhere Jesus says, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you... receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:21–22). Jesus' mission was unique. Only he has the power to pay the price for our sins and reconcile us with God. But he calls us to preach the same gospel he preached and to love and serve others as he loved and served us. We are to follow him (John 14:12) and to walk in the way he walked (1 John 2:6). This is the pattern we see in Luke's Gospel as Jesus sends his own disciples out to preach and to heal. In these words from Isaiah, Jesus reveals his fourfold ministry: preaching, healing, deliverance and justice.

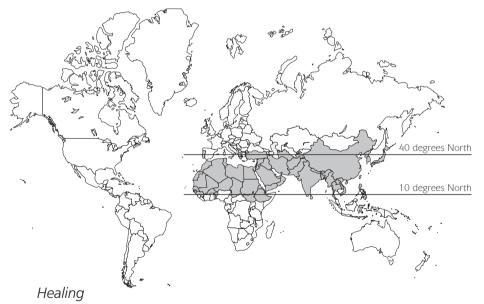
Preaching

'To preach good news to the poor' is the first goal of Jesus' manifesto. The gospel is his first priority, taking precedence over everything else. Jesus demonstrated this when people begged him to stay and do more miracles and healing. But he insisted that he had a job to do that was more important than this: 'I must preach the news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, *because that is why I was sent*' (Luke 4:43, emphasis added). Jesus' priority was preaching the gospel and he instructed his disciples to do likewise – in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8).

This should cause us to think: where are today's Jerusalems, Judeas and Samarias? So many people in the world still need to hear the gospel. If we were to lay a penny side by side for every Muslim in the world, the trail would stretch from London all the way east to Anchorage, the capital of Alaska! Preaching the gospel is our first priority and the task is far from finished. There are 1.6 billion Muslims, 1.1 billion atheists, 1.1 billion Hindus, 500 million in

Chinese and tribal religions, 500 million Buddhists, 100 million Sikhs, Jews and in Cults. There are also many hundreds of millions of nominal Christians who do not know Jesus as Lord and Saviour. ³

Unreached peoples are mainly in the 10:40 window – between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator – making up much of Africa and Asia. Many of these countries are called 'creative access countries' because missionaries must enter them using 'creative' means, such as by bringing medical or other professional help. But people from this window are also present in Western universities, cities and communities and readily accessible to us. God has brought the world to us. The cities of Europe and America in particular are the gateway to every culture in the world. Christians in Britain probably have more access to more people from more countries than anyone in human history.



Part of Jesus' manifesto was 'recovery of sight for the blind'. This reference does not come from Isaiah 61 but from Isaiah 35:5–6: 'Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.'

All the dramatic phenomena described in these verses were observed in Jesus' and the apostles' ministries. There was a restoration of the whole body, both as a sign of the gospel's authenticity and also as a demonstration of God's compassion. Christians may have the privilege of being used by God to restore sight to blind eyes and movement to broken limbs, either by supernatural means or by exercising good stewardship with the gifts of medicine that God has given equally graciously. Our concern should be to show the same concern for the whole person as a sign of the authenticity of the gospel, and to demonstrate God's compassion in mediating God's love.

Jonathan trained as an orthopaedic surgeon and took a job in a large London hospital where he was able to use his skills for the benefit of many patients. But he grew increasingly concerned about the fact that many children in the developing world were suffering disability from bone infections and fractures that could have been easily prevented. So he resigned his lucrative post in England and went to an African country where there was no orthopaedic service at all. He spent several years building a hospital and training paramedics to recognise and treat bone infections and fractures and later helped develop similar work in other countries.

Christian doctors and healthcare workers are needed in every field of medicine at every level, but especially in the hard places. We should think first about the developing world. By WHO definitions 39 million people worldwide still suffer from blindness, and yet 80% of all visual impairment can be cured. ² In 2012, there were 35 million people living with HIV. ³ The AIDS needs alone of many African countries could exhaust their entire health budgets. Yet effective prevention strategies exist; sexual faithfulness and the promotion of marriage play a key part in these. Despite the fact that tuberculosis

^{2.} Visual impairment and blindness factsheet. WHO, 2014 bit.ly/1vzaWUv

^{3.} Global health observatory - AIDS. WHO, 2014 www.who.int/gho/hiv

(TB) has been curable for relatively low cost for over 50 years, we now have the world's worst TB epidemic ever, exacerbated by AIDS and multi-drug resistant strains. The human impact of this treatable disease is equivalent to six fully laden jumbo jets falling out of the sky each day. Malaria still affects over 100 countries worldwide with one third of the world's population at risk; and now climate change is moving its frontiers northwards in Europe and the former USSR, endangering even more people.

WHO estimates that over 12,000 children aged 0–5 years die from preventable or treatable causes every day in the African Region. ⁴ These include infections such as diarrhoea, pneumonia and malaria, as well as neonatal problems that can be prevented by good antenatal care and safe delivery. Maternal health remains a priority, with 99% of pregnancy related deaths occurring in developing countries. ⁵ Jesus' respect for women as compared to prevailing attitudes in many parts of the world today is striking.

More wars are being fought today than at any time in history, so we can add the health needs of over 50 million refugees ⁶ and the legacy of more than 100 million items of unexploded ordnance and ammunition. ⁷ Alcohol and smoking related diseases, the diseases of ageing populations, drug abuse and prostitution, psychiatric disorders, surgical problems, industrial and road accidents, and pollution-induced illness all deepen the effects of debt in countries where health budgets have been slashed at a time when need and health problems are greatest.

Deliverance

'He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners' (Luke 4:18). Who are these prisoners? It is striking that just after this passage we read of Jesus' encounters with evil spirits; people were held captive by demons, captured by Satan, enslaved to do his will (Luke 4:31–37). It is a reminder that we also are locked in spiritual battle: the devil is

^{4.} Child and adolescent health overview. WHO regional office for Africa, 2014 bit.ly/1BLXsWm

Maternal mortality. WHO, 2014 bit.ly/1j1wjdy

Facts and figures about refugees. UNHCR, 2014 bit.ly/1bRcqkj

^{7.} Demining. UN, 2003 bit.ly/1jZDXAT

real and just as active today as he was then. His power base is false belief, and his most effective lie – prominent in the West – is that he doesn't exist at all. He suggests ways to lift our mood and get a buzz, numb our existential angst, gain pleasure and escape pain.

Instead of filling the aching hole in our lives with God, he suggests God-substitutes. Alcohol, drugs, tobacco and pornography create as much dependence and addiction in the developing world as they do in the West. The sort of overt deliverance we see in the life of Jesus – when demons are cast out and people miraculously delivered – is relatively rare in the West nowadays. Far more people turn from Christ today because of addiction to seemingly harmless Godsubstitutes than through overt devil-worship, but the effects are the same. Work, career, alcohol, food, drugs, sex, a prized possession or relationship; these can take over, distract and absorb, usurping God's place in people's lives. Many people suffer and die today because they become slaves to self-destructive lifestyles from which they need deliverance. Christians are called to be co-workers with Jesus in their deliverance.

Gwen was helping mothers in a local housing estate access welfare benefits that they were not aware they were entitled to. As she and others from her church came to a better understanding of the situation of the women they were helping, they realised that their difficulties were being worsened by drug misuse, gambling and indebtedness. So Gwen helped set up a drop in centre and provided debt counselling in conjunction with a national charity. A mother and toddler group developed into a Sunday school and several of the women attended a Bible study resulting in some joining the local church.

Many people don't really believe in the devil; others fear him. But the devil is like a dog on a leash. He can only do what God allows him to do. His judgment and ultimate destruction is assured. He had to ask

God's permission to afflict Job and sift Peter (Job 1:6–12, 2:1–6; Luke 22:31–32). We need not be afraid of him, but he is a powerful adversary. Without addressing the addictive sin and bondage to self-destructive lifestyles that so often lie behind diseases, we are not fully walking in Jesus' footsteps. We don't have to cast out demons to offer deliverance. We need simply to recognise that it is truth that sets people free and that our most powerful weapon to counter the devil is the word of God, which is God's truth. We must counter the self-destructive, flawed idea that salvation can be found in anything other than God himself.

Justice

The rest of Jesus' manifesto has to do with issues of justice: 'to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Luke 4:18–19). The Bible is clear that God's people are also to speak and stand for justice. We see this throughout Scripture and particularly in the Old Testament. We are called to be a voice for the voiceless (Proverbs 31:8–9), to fight injustice (Isaiah 58:6–10), to show mercy and compassion (Zechariah 7:9–10) and to bring in the year of the Lord's favour (Isaiah 61:1–2). Many commentators believe that the year of the Lord's favour referred to in Luke 4 and Isaiah 61 is the Jubilee year in which debts were forgiven, slaves released and property returned to its original owners, as described in Leviticus 25. U2's Bono quoted this passage at a US national prayer breakfast in 2006, which President Bush attended. His main point was that addressing developing world debt, which has such profound effects on health, was not an issue of charity but an issue of justice.

Dom Hélder Camara of Recife, who lived as a bishop among the poorest of the poor during the post-1953 Brazilian dictatorship, said: 'When I served the poor they called me a saint, when I asked why they were poor, they called me a communist'. 8 Camara was extremely well educated and capable of understanding the structural reasons for the deep poverty of so many of his fellow Brazilians. He challenged the obscene wealth of the rich and the embarrassing linkage of the Church with the powerful men in his country. Like the

Prophets and the Lord himself, he was a thorn in the side of the religious establishment.

Radical discipleship involves bringing justice and speaking out against the institutional evils that threaten the health and lives of vulnerable people. It involves being their advocates and empowering them to seek changes in their communities to improve the health of themselves and their children. Who are those who are marginalised today? Who has no voice?

Jesus had a special heart for the poor. Today two billion people still lack safe sanitation, one billion don't have safe water and a further billion live in severe poverty. This is an issue of justice. Every day 110,000 people in the developing world die, 20,000 of them children, largely from preventable diseases. To the materially poor we can add many other groups whose plights are at risk through injustice: Disaster victims, Asylum seekers and refugees, victims of abuse and trafficking, the unborn, those who are elderly or mentally ill.

Jesus was poor; Jesus was a refugee in Africa when his family fled from Herod; Jesus was once an unborn child. Christians have a responsibility to speak out and fight the corner of the marginalised, the disempowered and those without a voice: the poor, elderly or confused people; those with chronic or psychiatric illnesses; the terminally ill, children, born or unborn. Mordecai's words to Esther, urging her to speak out when her own people were under threat, are just as relevant to us today:

If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance... will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?

(Esther 4:14)

Being a real neighbour

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) to answer the question 'Who is my neighbour?' It tells of a man who was willing to cross cultural and racial barriers at considerable risk to help and advocate for someone who was in need, whom he had the power and resources to help. In giving this account, Jesus turned the question right around and asked back, 'Who was the neighbour?' When the man answered correctly he said, 'Go and do likewise'. In other words, go and be a real neighbour even to those with whom you feel you have no responsibility at all. All human beings are neighbours. In today's global village, when we have access to almost everyone in the world, that is a challenging call.

It is striking that the Good Samaritan was prepared to spend significant time and money helping someone in need whom he did not know. The apostle Paul too made a priority on his missionary journeys of raising money from wealthier churches to help those in poorer parts of the world. In pointing them to 'excel in this grace of giving' he pointed to the example of Jesus: 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Hugh worked for many years as a GP in Scotland but realised that at retirement he was still in a good state of health and had many useful skills to share with others. So he downsized his home and used some of his savings to help finance trips to train GPs in developing countries. He met up with others doing the same thing and developed a course that others could use. On his frequent trips abroad he was able to help by teaching in a new Bible college in the area and to pay for Bibles, commentaries and text books to resource it.

The global disparities of wealth in our world are huge. The richest fifth of the world's population enjoys 82.7% of the world's income, while

the bottom fifth earns just 1.4%. Christian discipleship involves living simply and giving sacrificially and generously. Eighteenth century revivalist John Wesley's famous aphorism was, 'Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.' We certainly do not want to be found like the men of Sodom who were 'arrogant, overfed and unconcerned' and 'did not help the poor and needy' (Ezekiel 16:48–50). The churches in the more prosperous northern hemisphere, in particular, need to return to living the gospel of Christ. Central to that is spreading the good news of salvation, but this preaching needs to be accompanied by lives of compassion, service and a striving for justice.

The Bible indicates that the time before Christ's return will be one of great suffering. Whether the end of the world is imminent or not (we must always be ready) – and whether our obedience to Jesus successfully changes the world's course or not – we are still called to be faithful. We may not be able to meet the need in any generation, but we can still show how the need can be met. We may not be able to stop the moral decay – but we can still stand firm for godly principles. We may not see many conversions, but like the first disciples we need to be preaching the gospel, because 'the time is short' (1 Corinthians 7:29 see also 2 Peter 3:11; Colossians 4:5).

And if with Christ's help we can stand together in facing this challenge then history will testify that we faithfully followed those who have gone before us. We may be wonderfully successful by God's grace in changing the course of history. The results are in God's hands. But regardless he calls us to be faithful.

Ted Lankester, of the health charity InterHealth Worldwide, ⁹ has outlined the huge opportunities for Christian health professionals this century to help the needy half of the world:

Working from hospitals and communities, in war zones and refugee camps, for governments, missionary societies and non-governmental organisations. Working short-term, long-term, as frontline surgeons, ophthalmologists,

physiotherapists, paramedics, in community rehabilitation or as travelling consultants – in repairing landmine injuries and war wounds, in HIV counsel, care and control – in teaching in medical schools, universities, or remote health posts – in running clinics for child prostitutes, migrant labourers and inner city junkies – in developing vaccines against malaria, dengue fever or HIV... what is called for is person-to-person responses in a world more open and accessible than ever. ¹⁰

But one does not have to be a health professional to make an impact on healthcare in the developing world. It is an activity for whole churches and whole Christian communities. All of us can pray, give and support others. We can all play a part in Jesus' great mission on preaching, healing and justice. In his book, *The Hole in our Gospel*, Richard Stearns, President of World Vision US lays out the challenge:

We are called to care for the widow, the orphan, the alien and the stranger. We're called to lift up justice and fight economic disparity; to speak up for the voiceless and to hold our governments accountable; to challenge racism and bigotry; to be generous with our money and to live lives of integrity before a watching world.

The most powerful evangelism of all involves not just speaking the good news but being the good news. Not just preaching the gospel but demonstrating the gospel because love for our neighbours that is only spoken is not love at all. You see love must be demonstrated.

This radical gospel of love, word and deed was intended by Jesus to launch a social and spiritual revolution on earth, one that had the power to change the world. And we were to be on the front lines of that revolution, we the church. That was the plan. Jesus called that the coming of the kingdom of God and it was meant to be good news for the entire world. ¹¹

^{10.} Lankester T. Global health priorities. Triple Helix 2000;11 pp. 18-20. bit.ly/15Yw3qA

^{11.} These comments extracted from an address based on *The hole in our gospel*, delivered by Richard Stearns at the Cape Town 2010 Lausanne Congress. Full video and partial transcript available at *bit.ly/1tldthq*

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WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

SESSION AIM

To explore the differing health needs across the world and to understand Christ's call to preach the gospel and help those in need.

ICEBREAKER

What major global health issues or crises have you heard of recently? How do you feel when you hear about these and similar situations?

WATCH THE DVD



Opening verses: Isaiah 61:1–2

DVD KEY POINTS

In high income countries most people die of chronic diseases; in low income countries most people die of infectious diseases.

Jesus sent out his followers 'to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick' (Luke 9:1-2).

Jesus' describes his mission in his 'Nazareth Manifesto' (Luke 4:14-21).

Preaching

'To preach good news to the poor' Unreached peoples are mainly in the 10:40 window – much of Africa and Asia.

Healing

'Recovery of sight for the blind'
Jesus' restoration of the whole body was a sign of the gospel's authenticity and an act of compassion.

Deliverance

*'He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners'*Jesus set people free from enslaving lifestyles and circumstances.

Justice

'To release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' Radical discipleship involves God's people bringing justice, speaking out, being advocates for and empowering vulnerable people.

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) answers the question: 'who is my neighbour?'

Summary

Christian health professionals have huge opportunities to 'preach and heal' in the needy half of the world. But whole churches and whole Christians communities can help by praying, giving and serving in a multitude of ways.

• EXPLORE

Key passages: Luke 4:16–21, 10:25–37; Isaiah 58:6–12 Use these, and any other relevant passages you can think of, to help you discuss the following questions.

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| In what ways can Christians be involved in Global Health those who are healthcare professionals and those who a | – botl are not |
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| Who is your neighbour in today's global village? How car be a good neighbour to those in your local community a those in other countries? Can you do both? | n you nd |

THE HUMAN JOURNEY

GO FURTHER

- Watch or read today's news. Use this to help you pray for the world. You may find resources provided by organisations such as Operation World and Tearfund helpful in guiding your prayers.
- What has challenged you as you worked through this session? Is there something you plan to do as a result? Tell someone in the group and ask them to hold you accountable to your plan.

PRAY

Pray all together or in smaller groups about what you've learned in this session. You may like to use these points as a guide:

- Pray for a renewed desire to love your neighbour as yourself.
- Pray for Christian churches, missions and charities serving the poor at home and abroad.
- Pray for governments that they would consider those in poverty when forming new laws and policies.

o GLOSSARY

- 10:40 Window: The rectangular area between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator (encompassing Saharan and Northern Africa, and almost all of Asia). The window is home to the majority of the world's unevangelised countries.
- Low income countries: Countries with a gross national income (GNI) of \$1,035 or less per person (eg Afghanistan, Uganda, Cambodia, Zimbabwe).
- High income countries: Countries with a gross national income (GNI) of \$12,616 or more per person (eg Germany, France, United States of America, United Kingdom).

To continue thinking about the topics raised in this session read chapter eight of *The Human Journey* book: Global Health – Who is my neighbour?

More resources on Global Health are available at www.humanjourney.org.uk