



WILLOW CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH
MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT

WORD ON THE STREET
HIS PASSIONATE FOCUS
PART 3

BILL HYBELS

1/15/06

In Luke 4:16-21, Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah words that define in part his earthly messianic mission. Christ-followers are called to join in the epic struggle to bring what goes on so right in heaven down to earth. It goes beyond just pointing people to Christ's love; it entails becoming the power and voice for those who are denied the very basic necessities of life. With information from studies on the working poor and extreme poverty in general, as well as personal experiences, Bill Hybels challenges listeners to find life in all its fullness by continuing Christ's mission to fix this broken world by overturning the systems that oppress the poor, the marginalized, the vulnerable. From the time you cross over the line of faith and decide you're a Christ-follower until the time you go to heaven, what are you going to do?

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WILLOW CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH

**WORD ON THE STREET
WHEN GOD WALKED THE PLANET
PART 3
1/15/06 – M0603**

Bill Hybels

**Luke 4:16-21
Mark 14:61**

**John 10:30
John 14:6**

**Luke 12:48
1 Timothy 6:18**

We're looking at the person of Jesus Christ, and we're doing it through the Book of Luke. And there's a reason why I'm going to ask you to do what I'm going to ask you to do next. I'd like to ask all of you here in South Barrington and at each of our regional sites, to rise to your feet for a moment.

I'm going to read the passage that we're going to jump into this weekend from Luke 4:16-21. And I want to read it, make a couple of comments on it, and then I'll ask you to sit down. But there's a reason I asked you to stand up, and it'll become apparent in the text.

And he—Jesus—went to Nazareth where he had been brought up—Nazareth was his home town. Tell the person next to you, where were you brought up. What home town? I bet very few of you said Barrington. [laughter] But this was Jesus' home town; it was where he was brought up—and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue,—the worshipping center—as was his custom. The one we follow made it a practice to gather with those who worshipped every weekend. It was his custom; it should be ours.

And he stood up to read. And the reason I'm asking you to stand up is that in the day of Jesus when Scriptures were read, to honor the authority and the power of Scripture, everybody always stood. The little African-American church that I attend in South Haven, Michigan, during my summer study break observes the same custom. Every time the pastor reads the Bible before his sermon, everybody stands. And they honor the authority of God's Word, the Bible. They did that in Jesus' day. Now does it have to be so in every congregation all around the world? It's not a biblical concept; it was just kind of one of those customs. But that's why I asked you to stand up, in honor of the passage we're reading and how they did it in Jesus' day.

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place—which meant that he had been very familiar with all the reading in that scroll, so he searched quickly and found the place—where it is written:—and here's the text we're really going to look at—“The Spirit of the Lord is on 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 favor.”

Then the Scripture says, *Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down.*—which is what you can do right now. You're doing a biblical thing right now; you're

sitting down. And the significance of that was in those days when rabbis or when teachers would teach, they usually would teach from a sitting position in order to distinguish their comments from the comments of Scripture.

When it was ‘here’s what God said in his Word,’ everyone would have to stand to their feet and listen to what God said. When it was ‘now here’s my human comment on what God said,’ they would always sit; so people knew the difference if it was God speaking through his Word or a teacher teaching about God’s Word.

The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture—the one he just cited from the Book of Isaiah—is fulfilled in your hearing.” Everything that the prophet said 700 years ago is being fulfilled right here and right now.

Now again, when we sit here in Barrington or DuPage County, McHenry, North Shore, we have really no idea of the power and the impact of what happened in that worship center on that Sabbath day so many years ago.

Again, Jesus was in his hometown. People knew him; he’d grown up in this town. He had probably recreated in the streets after school with his buddies. He probably knows everyone in the worship center that he’s standing in front of and then sitting and teaching. And he taught from that passage that pointed to the coming of the Messiah. The passage said that when the Messiah comes, and he’s coming, here’s what he’s going to do, here’s who he’s going to serve, here’s how he’s going to spend his time and his energy during the time he’s on the earth.

When Jesus finished reading that, he sits down and he looks at all of the people that he had grown up with, and he said, “I’m the guy. I am the guy that all of the Scriptures heretofore have been pointing to. And what the Scriptures say the Messiah is going to do, that’s what I’m going to do. And it starts now. Namely, I’m going to start forgiving people from sin and transforming them by the power of my love, and then I’m going to mobilize everyone who follows me to engage in the epic battle of establishing the Kingdom of God here on planet Earth. I’m going to try to get what’s going on so well in heaven right now to start going really well here on earth.

“All right, say with me the first part of the Lord’s Prayer: *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.* Now here’s the key part: *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* On earth; thy will be done *on earth* as it is *in heaven*. The things going on in heaven—the quality of relationships, the honoring of everybody, the peace, and all that—I’m going to try to get that all happening on planet Earth.

“I’m here to transform people and then to enlist them in this great struggle to bring what’s happening to heaven down on earth. That struggle involves motivating my followers to overturn the evil systems that keep the poor poor and to overcome the systems that unjustly incarcerate people, sometimes just because of the color of their skin. I’m going to inspire my followers to overturn the systems that keep marginalized people from medical attention and health care. I’m going to overturn any system that oppresses the weak and the vulnerable.”

And Jesus says, “This epic struggle begins now. I’m here, and the starting gun has gone off; and I’m going to ask you after this little talk if you’re going to accept me and join me or reject me.”

And when you read what happens later on in this text, a whole bunch of people from that day forward start rejecting Jesus. A group of them actually dragged him out of that worship center that day—this is his first message to his hometown and at the end of it, they drag him out—and they’re going to throw him off a cliff. But he stands with his power and majesty and they’re drawn back; and he walks through them unscathed and moves on in his ministry. It’s quite a dramatic passage.

Again, you’ve got to understand the drama in this. He’s in his hometown and right in front of all these people, he says, “Man, I’m the Messiah. And here’s what I’m really going to do.”

Most of the Jews wanted the Messiah, when he arrived, to be a political deliverer, a military leader-type that could help them get Rome off their backs. Or they wanted him to be an impressive economist astute enough to lead Israel into an era of prosperity and wealth. And Jesus says, “You know my main mission is not to fight Rome or to make you wealthy and happy on earth. My main mission is to free you from your sin and enlist you into waging war against the systems that consign people to poverty, disease, despair, and hopelessness.”

That was a big pill for his listeners to swallow that day. And still today it’s a pretty big pill to swallow for people who are thinking about following Jesus Christ. When you think of committing your life to somebody whose main mission was to live a life of compassion instead of power, to live a life of serving the poor instead of acquiring wealth and power, to live a life of lifting up the downtrodden instead of stepping on people who get in his way, it’s still a big pill for all of us to swallow.

Some of you may be choking on that pill this weekend. And if you’re choking on it a little bit, that’s what this series is about—to create a little disequilibrium, to have you rethink who is Jesus Christ. Was he the real deal? Is he worth following and committing your life to?

Last weekend we attempted to compare Jesus to three other top-tier religious leaders of all time: Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed. And we used visuals to kind of stack up their influence and their uniqueness.

We did a lot of visiting in Guest Central after that message. A surprising number of people asked me and Gene and others who were there if Jesus ever really came out and claimed to be the Messiah. Those questions kind of indicated to me that there are a lot of people who are just at the beginning of their spiritual journey here with us in this series. And so I determined to clear that up this week, to answer that with unequivocal clarity.

In Mark 14:61 Jesus was asked point blank, *Are you the Christ, the Messiah?* And Jesus said, *I am.*

In John 10:30 Jesus said, *I and the Father are one.* I’m the second person of the Trinity; I and the Father are one.

He says in John 14:6, *I am the way and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

He regularly told people who he was, and that's kind of what made him as controversial as he was. He was this fantastic communicator, this moral man and a prophet and a healer and all these things, and then he would say, "I am the long-awaited Messiah. I'm the one who can forgive your sin and make you right with God."

The heart of what I want to talk with you about is how Jesus described what's called his messianic mission. And maybe in order for me to do that, I need to wow you with artwork. I know you've been missing my artwork. The only art joke I know is the line about modern art: Modern art is a conspiracy between artists and wealthy people to make the rest of us seem stupid. [laughter]

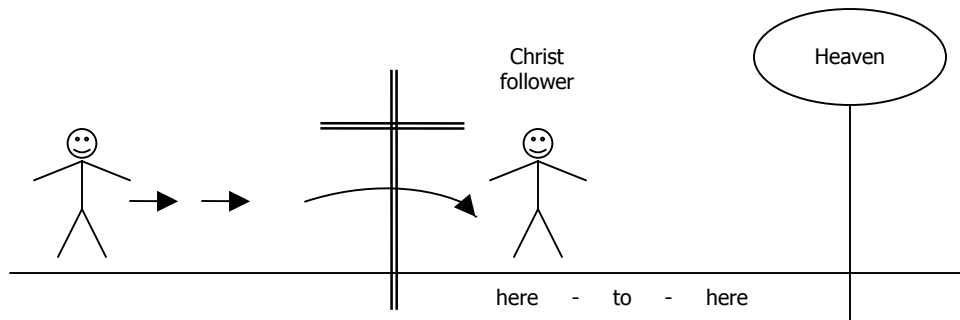
I drew this for you about a year ago [see below for diagram] when we were in the series about *Living Beyond Myself*. So here you are, you're cruising through life and then you run smack dab into Jesus Christ. You get confronted with his claims of being the Son of God, and you have to contend with this. You have to decide as the listeners did in the synagogue in Nazareth, is Jesus the Messiah or isn't he? Are you going to accept him, go his way, receive his love, get on his plan—or are you going to reject him like so many did when they threatened to throw him off the cliff that day?

But Jesus moves through human history like one of those big country snowplows that goes down the middle of the road with a V-plow and just forces snow to one side of road or the other. That's what Jesus does as he plows through history stating who he is and what his claims are. He forces people to decide. Are you for him or against him? Are you going to line up the purposes of your life with the purposes of his life or no? You've got to choose.

Hopefully someday every one of you will come to the place where you go, "You know what? I want to receive him and I want to step across the line of faith and I want to become a Christ-follower. I want to get on his plan."

We're going to talk about that plan in greater detail in just a moment. But the promise of Scripture is that those who put their faith and trust in Christ will eventually wind up in heaven where you'll spend all of your eternity with him in this unimaginable state of existence that the Bible teaches about.

Here's the burning question. From the time you cross over the line of faith and decide you're a Christ-follower, from that time till the time you go to heaven, what are you going to do? Why doesn't Christ, when he saves you, why doesn't he just express freight you straight to heaven? [laughter] I mean, that's what all history is pointing toward; that's your ultimate reality for the rest of eternity. What happens between the point of crossing over and the point of heaven, the here-to-here on the diagram?



That’s what the text we just read is driving at. Jesus says, “Look, between those two points, we have to fix this broken world.” You don’t just become a Christ-follower, stay on your own plan, build your own little kingdom, and then some day in the by-and-by when you’re old and gray and washed up, you die and go to heaven. This is not your era anymore. This is not something that you have mastery over. This becomes a God-designed era in your life where you get on his plan to find your role in fixing this broken world.

When you get on that plan, and when you start to understand what it entails, that’s when you find life in all its fullness. You begin to understand that being on that God-guided adventure is living life at another whole level than just competing for the wealth and the achievement and the prizes and the toys of this world.

So when Jesus announces what his program is, what he’s going to be calling his followers to, he cites that passage we read in Luke 4 and he says, “You know what it’s mainly going to be about, this whole era from here to here, what I mainly want you to do. Yes, I want you to point people to my love; but then when they receive it, we’re going to band together, and one of the main things we’re going to do is we’re going to address the needs of the poor. We’re going to set our agenda on those who are marginalized and those who are vulnerable and those who have no power and have no voice. We’re going to become their power and their voice. And we’re going to lift them up, kind of just one life at a time.

Jesus would say throughout his teaching that one thing you’d know about his followers, and what will distinguish them from the non-followers, is that their hearts are going to beat fast for people in need. Their hands are going to be busy trying to do something about it. Their wallets are going to reflect not just a \$5.00 shot here and there, but a willingness to stretch and sacrifice for those who continually live with less. My followers, Jesus would teach, are going to fight for the poor.

One reason I am so humbled and reverent this weekend is because this is a national holiday when we are reflect about Martin Luther King, Jr. Very few people in all of history fought for the poor like he did. And he paid a high price. But he fought with courage and determination for food for the poor and housing and education and job opportunities. He inspired people. And you remember that he was first a preacher; he was first a Christ-follower and then a social activist. It was his understanding of text like we read earlier: he has *anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners*—racial prisoners. These are the kinds of text that Dr. King would speak of again and again and again.

I've been doing some reading in recent weeks leading up to this message and one of the books that I read is a book called *Nickled and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich. This author spent a whole book describing a class of poor that I want to spend a moment talking about. These are the working poor.

Barbara Ehrenreich is a very accomplished writer; she's written 12 books. Kind of an East Coast gal, very intelligent and highly trained. And she spent the better part of a year living in three different cities in the U.S., several months in each city, trying to carve out a workable life at entry-level jobs. She did this sort of undercover. And what she discovered is what millions of Americans are disillusioned by these days; namely, that a person can work very hard at a 40-hour a week job at entry-level pay with a decent employer and still wind up having to live literally on the streets.

What she found out and what lots of people are finding out all over the United States is that the economic math that used to work is no longer working in many parts of the country. The monthly wages earned at entry-level jobs these days will probably not be sufficient to allow for the rental of a single-bedroom apartment in the area you work and the purchase of nutritional groceries in order to at least eat a healthy diet. It probably won't give you the earning power to buy a used car or to purchase new clothing or toiletries or over-the-counter medicines, let alone the building up of a little emergency fund for when trouble hits or building up a little nest egg where you can put aside the down payment on a house.

This writer time and time again worked 40 hours a week at good places and couldn't make ends meet with just food and shelter. So in order to try and make ends meet, she would work additional hours at part-time jobs on the weekends.

And this was rather ironic—she makes quite a point of it in the book—that she was working often for companies that are raking in profits in the hundreds of millions while their entry-level employees had no medical benefits, no transportation, no ability to save or invest, and schools in their communities were substandard. And there's a growing disillusionment among this group of people that those who earned higher wages and have greater influence in the companies ... maybe the people in leadership of those companies don't even know or maybe don't even care that this is going on and that their entry-level people are having all these problems.

From what the Book of Luke tells us about the purpose and the mission of Jesus, near the top of his list was to transform the structures and the systems in society that suck the hope out of people who are doing what society tells them they ought to do, but it's not enough for them to live beyond the level of despair.

Many years ago I met a man who has since died. He was the owner of a dynamic company, and he had his whole world rocked by a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. He was in a good church that did a balanced job of teaching about Christianity and was under the teaching of a pastor who taught a lot about the poor. So he got his conscience pricked more than once about his responsibility as a Christ-follower in the marketplace.

One day after one of those sermons where he got his world rocked by the power of the teaching of Christ, he went to his company where he had lots of entry-level employees and met with a pilot group of a these employees he paid minimum wage to. And he asked what quality of life could they maintain working at his company at minimum wage. And the answers creamed him. He couldn't believe it.

The entry-level workers in his company could not live in the area where his company was located. They couldn't afford just the basic necessities of life. So later on that day he called an emergency meeting of his whole financial team; and he said he was going to commission them to do a study of what was the true cost of living in the community. What are apartment rental rates? What do starter homes cost? What are mortgage rates these days? What is the mortgage rate that you could get a starter home for? What are food costs? Utility costs? Transportation costs? School-related expenses?

After they assembled all that information over a period of months, he asked his team to calculate what hourly pay rate for his entry-level workers would be enough for them to have the kind of life that he as a Christian business owner ought to be affording for his people. And to his credit and in deference to the teaching of Christ and in defiance of business logic, he rearranged a whole new economic model for his company. He raised the minimum wage far beyond what the minimum wage was for our country and lifted the whole entry-level part of his workforce out of despair.

I heard about this—the story was written up in magazines—and actually arranged a meeting with him because I was so impressed by what he had done.. When I asked him about why he did it, he said these words which I'll never forget, "If I talk it on Sunday, I've got to walk it on Monday to Friday. If I sit in a church and sing that Christ means a lot to me, if I read a Bible and agree with the preaching of my pastor—if I talk it and sing it on Sunday, I've got to walk it on Monday to Friday. It's just what Jesus taught us to do."

I thought that was one of the coolest things I had heard.

In a church like Willow, at all of its campuses, one thing that makes me tremble from time to time is just how many of us in this church are in positions of influence at our places of employment. And Jesus would teach again and again, to whom much is given, be it influence or resource or power, to whom much is given, much is required. (Luke 12:48) I wonder if any of us really ponder deeply about whether or not following Christ has any bearing on how we pay people. Does it have any bearing on the conditions we ask workers to work in or the policies that govern their lifestyle or their earning potential?

And I wonder if the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ wouldn't whisper to us this weekend that maybe we could do something. Maybe we are the people in this era of our life in the position we're in because Christ wants us to lift up the downtrodden, even at the place of our own employment. That's something we could think about. That's something that we might be able to do.

The second book that I've been reading on this subject matter doesn't talk so much about the working poor, although the author would be very concerned about those who would be considered that. This book is about those who live in extreme poverty. What is extreme poverty? Some of you know that I just got back from another 10-day trip to Africa, and I read this book on the heels of that trip. The book is called *Walking with the Poor* and it's written by Bryant Myers.

When I was in Africa, I was reflecting on extreme poverty and sort of how would I define it—I was there ostensibly to do a videotaping about AIDS and some of the work we're doing over there—and I couldn't shut my mind off. I mean, when we were going from one place of videotaping to the next, instead of just chilling out and thinking about something else, I would just look out the windows of the vehicle or when we were walking I would just look around and go, "This is so broken."

What am I seeing that is gripping me so much? Extreme poverty, as I'm thinking about it more these days ... in extreme poverty, the overwhelming feeling of every minute of every day is jaded by non-stop hunger. When I was en route traveling back from Africa, I was sitting in some lounge in an airport next to a guy and we were just making small talk. And the guy was complaining that he had been on a flight from Chicago to Dallas that didn't serve any food and he was so hungry he was going to die.

It's only a 90-minute flight! And I looking at him, and he's packing on about 40 extra pounds of freight; [laughter] and I'm going, you could fly a long time and it wouldn't ... You know, I had just come out of an environment where people would fall over and die from hunger, and here's a guy moaning and groaning because he can't go 90 minutes sitting down and doing nothing without being fed a meal. I remember just thinking, these are alternate realities.

We don't know this world of poverty; we don't know what this is like. A couple of years ago I watched a report about a guy from CNN who was studying poverty and studying the effects of hunger, and he interviewed a guy who had lived with hunger his whole life. So this CNN reporter very boldly said, "Well, I'm going to live your life for 30 days. I'm going to eat exactly what you eat for 30 days." On day 21 this CNN reporter had to bail. He was dizzy, he was faint, he couldn't function. His mind slowed down, his body started wasting away. He couldn't take it. Twenty-one days. This other guy had lived 40 some years like this, every single day.

People in extreme poverty—there are, get this right, billions of them on planet Earth who live in extreme poverty and who are hungry every day. Poverty also involves shelter. You have to experience what it's like to live in a cardboard box. I was in Cairo some time ago, walking down the street, looking at all the poverty, and I see a burned out automobile on its top on the sidewalk. I was questioning why the city workers don't drag this thing away. And I walked around the other side, and there was a family living in it.

I was in India some years back and saw that they were putting in a new sewage system in one part of the city of Mumbai. Here're all these sewer pipes waiting to be put in. But living inside these 8-foot circumference sewer pipes were hundreds of families. Families had started to live in the sewer pipes because it was better shelter than what they had before the pipes.

And you have to understand, there are billions of people who live like this. Sanitation is another thing. In Samfya one morning, we were just starting the taping, and I see this mother come out of her little hut. And she's got three or four kids, and they're filthy dirty. It's like 8:00 in the morning and these kids are filthy dirty, and they're wearing filthy dirty clothes. And I realize she has to walk a mile to get good water; so, yes, she didn't get to do the laundry last night.

If you went a day without a shower, you'd hate that. Well, some people don't have water or laundry facilities. They don't have the dignity of even being clean.

And access to medical treatment. I've been reading so much about it. Do you know how many children—and I don't even want to give this statistic because it would just freak you out so much, you wouldn't listen to the point. But there are so many children who die every single day of diarrhea. And you can solve that with pills that cost pennies. It's just happening every single day by the hundreds and thousands just because of unfair distribution of medical supplies.

Education. We could talk about the whole education injustice that goes on. And economic opportunity. Of the six billion people in the world, three billion—one half of humanity—live on less than \$2 a day. And they have no access to capital, so they can't get the loan that will get them ahead.

That's the kind of world that billions of people live in. Let me show you the real problem in equation form. This is just the presenting problem, if you want to think of it that way.

$$EP + X = AM$$

EP is the Extreme Poverty that we just looked at. Add X to the equation. X would be something like AIDS or famine or civil war, like in the Democratic Republic of the Congo right now where in the last 10 years, three million people have died. This is in one country. Three million people have died in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the last 10 years, and the world doesn't even know about it. And if Dr. King were here, he'd say part of the reason the world doesn't know and wouldn't care much is because they're black. They're out of sight and out of mind. If they were Europeans, it'd be the front page of every paper every day.

So you add the X of AIDS or famine or war or natural catastrophes—floods, hurricanes, and these kinds of things—to Extreme Poverty and that equals AM, Abject Misery, a level of suffering on a day-to-day basis that just boggles the human mind. And if you can understand this, this is like a graduate school understanding of the plight of the poor.

But Bryant Myers says that when people have only ever lived in abject misery, they begin to experience MI, a Marred Identity. The equation becomes $EP + X = AM + MI$

What do we mean by marred identity? A marred identity is when people internalize the misery of their ongoing lives. They begin to believe they deserve this. They believe that the powers that be, the gods of fate, have relegated them to this way of live and there is nothing, absolutely nothing, they or anybody else can do to change their lot in life. And when you develop a marred identity,

then you fall into a listlessness and a lifelessness and a hopelessness that's just palpable for those who observe you.

On this last trip as I went through some villages, I could see in their eyes and in their posture, I could hear in their voices of resignation that the Good News that Jesus or you or I might come to proclaim doesn't get much of a response because the possibility of Good News died in them decades ago. And all that's left inside their emaciated bodies is this marred identity: souls so damaged that apart from a supernatural work of God, their souls will shrivel a little more every day of their misery-filled lives until their last day.

And I don't know what my words are doing to you right now, but if you could see the kind of thing that I'm describing, if you have a heart at all, it would wreck you. It would shift something inside of you that would never shift back. I've been traveling to third world countries for 25 years, and the last time I went ... I don't know if it's because God has me in a different condition, I don't know what it is; but something just turned inside of me on this last trip. And I can't get it back to where it was.

It helps me understand with greater clarity why when Jesus launched his ministry, he said that he and his followers were going to confront the structures and the systems and the people that work together in darkness of mind and spirit to keep the poor poor. He said, "We're going to announce some Good News to those people who are very close to having a marred identity. And we're going to work till the sun goes down to let a certain group of people know that they are not forgotten, they are not damaged goods, they are not hopeless, and they are not beyond the possibility of being loved by our great God or loved by his followers."

As you'll see through the next weeks, Jesus identified with the poor by how he lived. He associated with the poor and hung out with them often. He healed those who had no recourse for medicine. He fed the hungry by the thousands. And he said to those with marred identities, "You're treasured creations of the most high God. I will redeem you and call you my own."

But the most important thing that Jesus did is call his followers to join him in that epic struggle to bring what's going on so right in heaven down to planet Earth and to join him in fixing this broken world.

I was thinking about the highlight of my life in 2005. I try to do highs and lows every year end. You know, what was my highest high and lowest low. And I had some lows in '05, some pretty low lows, actually. And I had some highs, by God's grace. But I was trying to be ruthlessly honest with myself and figure out when did I have my highest high.

And it came very clearly to me, for reasons I'm not all that sure of yet—when I was in that little village and went to the food distribution center where 50-pound bags of mealy meal were being distributed to the mothers who had taken in AIDS orphans and when I realized that Willow Creek Community Church ... here we are, suburban Chicago ... Willow Creek Community Church supplies half of the AIDS orphans in that village with these bags of mealy meal. This mealy meal represents the difference between life and death; and out of the goodness of your

generous hearts, we might be able this year to take on the other half, which means every AIDS orphan in that entire village will receive enough food to live beyond the hunger level.

And it was the hope of that and the thought of that that brought me one day to connect with a mom who got a bag, and she was going to be able to feed her two kids and the two AIDS orphans that she had adopted. She had to carry the mealy meal a long way, so I put this 50-pound bag over my shoulder and started walking with her down this path to her hut. And I was walking down the path with the bag of food over my shoulder, and I'm looking at this woman and these four kids that she's caring for; and for some reason, I thought of the words of 1 Timothy 6:18 when Paul says to Timothy, mainly about people with a lot of resources, *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may*—and this is the phrase I want to leave you with—*they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

Here I am walking in some remote village with a 50-pound bag of maize over my shoulder to the hut of a woman caring for AIDS orphans, and I'm, like, I feel more alive in this moment than I have any moment in the calendar year 2005. I feel aligned with divinity; I feel in cadence with Christ; I feel that I'm gaining clarity on what he wants me to do to address the needs of this broken world. The highlight of '05 for me was carrying a bag of food that you provided, that we provided, for that woman.

And here's my prediction as we move into '06: I think God's going to continue to stir in our church; and I think one by one by one by one by one, more and more of us are going to get what Jesus wants us to do in helping fix the broken world. We're to gain clarity on what it means to help the working poor and the extremely poor, and we're going to find our way of putting a foodbag on our shoulder and walk with someone. And we're going to experience life that is truly life.

And I think you want that as badly as I do. [applause]

Let's stand for closing prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we're so grateful for the life that Jesus lived, for his redemptive power, and for the unspeakable privilege of him asking us to join him in the epic struggle to fix this sorry planet.

We're so grateful that we get to do this, and we get to do it together; and the doing of it leads to life that is really life. So stir deeply in people's hearts; shift something inside of them; give them a vision beyond their picket fence. And God, as we do this, the smile of heaven will break forth and your blessing will fall on us individually and as a church like we've never seen it before. We yearn for that, God.

And everyone agreed in Jesus' name and said: Amen.