



Sermon – November 18, 2018
Dr. Wess Stafford

Amen! What a wonderful morning to be here. You can be seated for a second. We are so glad that you're here with us this morning. You've made it out through the mist and the cold to get here. And it's just a joy to have you. So to those of you who are part of our church family, it's good to see you this morning. To those of you visiting with us, either in person or online, we're excited to have you here today and thank you for joining us. Today's a special day in the life of the church. Today is Compassion International Day here. And so we've got a special guest speaker Pastor Chris will be introducing to you shortly. But it's just an exciting day to be here and to hear what God is doing around the world and doing to reach people. So we're excited you're here. If you are a first time guest and you are here, we would love for you to take this white card in the seat back in front of you and fill out your information because we would like to contact you and be able to know how we can serve you and how we can be praying for you. And if it's your first time, you can go right, right back through here, right through these back middle doors to the welcome desk. We would love to give you a special guest for being your first time. Now because it's Compassion International Sunday, just a reminder, there are no Life Groups. But we encourage you to go to go meet at the booths, to go through the Compassion Experience, if you've not already or are planning to. It's out here in this parking lot jut in front of the church. It's really an incredible opportunity to go through and see where many of these children that are sponsored through Compassion International, to see their stories and where they come from. So that said, if you would stand up, find someone you do not know, and greet them this morning in the house of the Lord.

Heavenly Father, God, we thank You for being our God, God I thank You for being my God, our personal Heavenly Father that we can bring our life, our struggles, our everything to You, Lord. God You know it all. We praise Your name. The name of Jesus has changed my life; it's changed our lives. God we thank You for Him. Lord we love You. Speak to us this morning as we hear from Your word. We thank You for Jesus and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

So, man, I appreciate a crowd on this kind of wet, nasty day. I appreciate you being here. We have a unique experience today. Because it's Compassion Weekend. If you haven't had a chance, we want you to go through their exhibit out there. We have a privilege today of hearing from Wess Stafford who ran Compassion for a number of years. He's now the president emeritus. I got to know Wess in Bolivia. We spent a good bit of time together. Came to really appreciate his heart because it really fits ours. Let me just take a minute or two. I've always been Southern Baptist,

obviously. And I've grown up with the idea that the Cooperative Program is the only way to do missions. It was a good idea, at its inception particularly, but over the years it had one huge drawback in that you never really knew the missionaries and you certainly did not know the people that the missionaries connected with. Compassion is a church-based ministry. They go into an area, operate through a church, you adopt a child, so you know that child. You communicate with that child. So you know the one that the missionaries are trying to reach and impact.

Second reason I love Compassion is that I think it gives us that tactile, emotional response that we can have. The other reason is because when we were looking at building the children's building, I did a thing in here which I've done in every church I've ever been in. And I had us raise our hands for people saved 70 and below all the way down. When I had us raise our hands for 18 and below, literally 96% in this church raised their hand. And I remember there was this gasp across the congregation because we just assumed that it's adults that come to Christ when in fact the vast majority of us, well over 90%, came to Christ after we were 18. So I was sharing with Wess this when we were in Bolivia and he said to me, that's true all over the world. And I said, "No, no, no. That's just an American phenomenon." And he said, "No, no, no. George Barna was on their staff and researched and discovered that exactly what we've seen in this church is all over the world. And the great thing about Compassion is, they hit where I think the missionary enterprise ought to hit. They go after children, particularly that are in poverty and have no chance without somebody stepping into their life. So you're going to have a chance to do that today when service is over. But Wess is going to come and share with you; his testimony is galvanizing. I appreciate his heart. Loves Jesus. The only thing I fear for him, he said he's got two daughters that may be getting married and so I ache for him in that respect. But other than that, you welcome Wess Stafford.

Thank you, buddy.

Good morning, Central. Actually the Aggies on Compassion staff tell me I should say, Howdy, Central. Is that right? What a joy, joy to be here. And as your precious pastor just said, I had the privilege of taking him to see Compassion's work in Bolivia. So he has seen it firsthand. What a great guy, by the way. Do you know how fortunate you are to have this man shepherding you in this church? Chris, thank you. I got to watch him, we visited families that lived in little shacks that were responsible for making a thousand bricks a day and they made \$10 at that. And even their little children were there. And I watched him visiting these little tiny shacks and treating them like royalty. Watched him with the peasant pastors in this little town that we visited. Praying for them. Listing them up. Watched him play around with the children. Long story short, it didn't take me long, like you, to fall in love with this dear, dear guy.

I'm thrilled to be here today to finally actually see you because you should hear how he speaks of you. I had the impression, and I know this is Texas, but I had the impression that everybody here was going to be 10 feet tall, walk on water, leap buildings in a single bound, I see that that's not totally true. But the other part he did say, you believe in your children and you love your children here. And I've had the chance to see that that was absolutely true. And I had a tour of your children's section. Have you been through there? I have never seen a church in 41 years of fighting for children, that believes and invests in their children like I see here at Central. So my heart is, my heart is really really warm. Your heart for missions, your heart for children. I feel, I feel right at home. I told him as I took the tour, I'm throwing all my notes away. What I intended to say

this morning I don't need to say because you get it. You understand. Normally, you have to understand, I am speaking at conferences, it's often to seminaries, and others. And I'm having to make the case the children actually matter. They are worthy of investment. Not just in order to reach their parents, but because of who they are and what they can bring to the kingdom. And so it's often missionary executives and it's often seminary professors and theologians. And I can tell, I can see, I can tell by the body language when I begin to speak. You know, they're like this. And they're looking. We're here to talk about what? Children? What don't I know about children? And so I have to unpack my statistics and my strategies and my scriptural mandate about children. And if I don't get through to them with that, I have to go after their ego. And I say, "You do realize, don't you, that everyone here is a child development expert?" They sit up a little straighter in their seat. And I say, "Let's do a little research. How many of you were ever a child?" Raise your hands high. Yep. Yep. I have never met anyone on this planet who either is a child or was a child. So none of us can say that children thing, that's not my thing. You spent 18 years doing nothing but being a child. There's nothing I can tell you about that. Nobody can say they don't matter.

And it is true around the world. Line up, line up 10 Christians and ask them "When did you give your life to Christ?" And 80% typically will say I did that while I was a child between the ages of 4 and 14. Barna tells us, by the way, if you don't bring a person to Christ by the age 20, the probability is only about a 6% probability that they ever will come to Christ. Now here's the great tragedy. If 85% of us give our lives to Christ while we're children, you would think that's what missions would be all about out there, right. No. It's a rare mission organization that spends more than 10% of its effort on children. And it is a rare church that spends more than 15% of its budget on reaching and discipline children. And you guys at Central, you are really, really the exception.

So I feel like I'm on vacation today. I'm throwing out everything I was going to say and I'm just going to, I'm just going to tell you why it is I care. Where did it come from? Why would I throw 40 years of my life into a ministry speaking up for the least of these? The little ones in the kingdom. I never met a champion for children who doesn't have a pretty powerful reason for why they care. I saw Sherry and Chris out there. Both of them highly motivated and I'm willing to bet if you looked into it, the Genesis of that passion for children started when they were children themselves. Proverbs 31:8 says: So speak up for those who can't speak for themselves. And that's what I've been doing for 40 years. That's why I wrote the book Too Small To Ignore. Why I have written Just A Minute. Why I have served day by day for 40 years.

So my battle for children began a long, long time ago. I think while I was being knit in my momma's womb, I think my DNA was being knit and the angels must have watched over. And when I was born they must have said, "Well he's just as cute as a button, isn't he?" But he's not a rocket scientist. We're going to have to make it clear what he's to do with his life. So I was born to Ken and Marge Stafford. Ken and Marge Stafford were part of a Baptist church in Denver. Ken was the shiest farm boy you ever, ever met from Wheat Ridge. And Marge was the exact opposite. She was the cheerleader, bubbly gal. The only way these two lives could have come together was they both went to the same church: Judson Memorial Baptist Church. The name alone should tell you it was all about missions. And so they were childhood sweethearts and then high school sweethearts and they use to always sit in the back. These missionaries that came through were pretty scary guys. They would come through with their big ole python skins. You

know, they'd roll it out across the platform. They would tell stories and show jars of scorpions from Africa that were as big as your foot. And they used to nudge each other and say, "No, no, no. Not us. We're not doing that. Lord please don't call us to be missionaries. And if you do, please, not Africa." So you guessed it. I was born into a missionary family in Africa. Be careful what you pray for. Not just Africa, but the Ivory Coast of West Africa which was one of the hottest, nastiest, most remote places in the world. Dusty, dusty. On the Sahara Desert. I have a Golden Retriever named Sahara as you might imagine. A typical day in my village was 120 degrees. Six months of no rain and that kind of heat and six months of nothing but rain and that kind of heat still. We were remote. We only had one, two little rut road that came through our part of Africa. We had no electricity out there. Consequently, as you can imagine, that heat, no fan, no air conditioning, no television, no refrigerator. My city girl mom, I remember, used to stand at the kitchen sink, washing dishes in the Tupperware, looking out across the Sahara Desert, the shimmering heat, and she would say, "Well way out here I don't have very many luxuries, but I've got one. I've got running water. Wess run to the well and get some water." So I was back and forth, back and forth. I was the running water in our house.

I was a typical missionary kid. I ran around barefoot in that village. Most of the time had a slingshot around my neck at all times. I was skinny as a rail. I was sickly. I nearly died about six times. Took quinine pills every day, but Malaria nearly killed me. Worse than Malaria was Army Ants. Closest I ever came to death was ants. Yeah, I don't have time to tell you that whole story, but you can join me in this cause. Step on every ant you see. I will cross the street if I suspect there's an ant on that sidewalk over there. They bit me all over my body. Injected poison. I swelled up like the Michelin Man. The whole village gathered around and prayed that God wouldn't let the little white boy die. And, and as you see, I didn't. I got problems, but I didn't. I spoke four languages every day, but none of them very well. English was my weakest language. My sister and I were the only white children for 100 miles in any direction. And it took a whole day to drive 100 miles. That was to our nearest hospital.

My father was a linguist. He took the Senufo language of the Ivory Coast and put it into writing and then translated scriptures. From the time I was 7 years old, I was teaching Africans how to read their own language. We'd pump up the Coleman lantern and I, you can imagine, I can barely read myself, but I could read better than anybody for 100 miles in any direction. And if you'd asked me as a 7-year-old, "What are you?" I'd say, "I'm a missionary." The only thing there was to read was what my father was translating day by day in his hot, tin shed. We opened villages to the gospel, my father and I. We left my mom and sister home because it was too dangerous. But we opened villages to the gospel that had not seen a white person since the slave traders. And we risked our lives in order to get in there, speak their language, and introduce them to a God who loves them. My village, Nielle, had a, had a proverb. It takes the whole village to raise a child. Now this wasn't a plaque on their wall. This is how everybody lived. Every child belonged to every grownup. And that's kind of what I feel here at Central when I see how you've invested in, in your kids. I might have been the wrong color, but they welcomed me. They raised me just like they did their own children. I was just another one of the village boys. Never fell down as a little guy without some African woman swooping in, picking me up, drying my tears, sending me on my way. Didn't get away with a lot of mischief because everybody thought I was their kid. And being the only white kid around, I really stood out. I remember the chief one time as we gathered around the campfire, which we did every evening, he said, "You know the goats are getting a little

skinny this year. And it's not because we're in a drought. It's because the little boys are chasing them around. And in the swirling red sand and dust, I don't know who the culprits are, but I know this. That little white boy right there, he's one of them." And so I prayed every night as a little boy, "Please, Lord, and I know You can do this. You brought down the walls of Jericho. You parted the Red Sea. In the morning when I wake up, let my skin be black like all of my friends." That would be the first thing I would check every morning. I would throw off my sheet, "Ah! Still white. But maybe tomorrow. I'll keep trying."

They taught me what they taught their kids. My skills, my values, they taught us. I learned, I learned how to hunt. Chris knows that. We were hunting buddies. I learned how to hunt from the Africans. I learned how to fish from them. I learned how to farm from them. The beauty of growing up in a little African village that are primarily farmers, is you don't have to wait until you're a grown up to add value to, to what's going on there. Even little children, you may not be able to chop down a tree, but you can carry twigs. But they did entrust a very difficult job to little boys, 6 and 7 year olds. We used to have Baboons, herds of Baboons that could come in and destroy five acres of corn in a single night. I mean really, a space about the size of this. And the job of the little boys was to build a platform at the edge of the corn and with our slings, shoot those Baboons. When I say Baboon, I'm not talking cute little monkey here. I'm talking they were bigger than we were. And they had teeth on them like a Rottweiler. And we would be up on the stand, we could hear them coming through the elephant grass. And this is what we used to do. We either had the choice of shooting a warning shot before they actually got into our corn or waiting until they were actually committing the crime in our corn. And give them a PhD on why you don't do that in with our corn. And or was it almost time to eat? Did we want to bean them on the head and then roast them up on the fire at our feet? It was always a choice. We could do any of those. And so this is what, this is what us little guys, I was six-years-old doing this. You sound people you are not safe back there. This is what we used to do. Almost made it to the back row Baptists. Nice try. It's good to be good at something. That's about the only thing I can do really well. And a rock goes a lot better than a marshmallow. You're afraid a giant was going to come a tumbling down didn't you. I remember my mother when she was teaching us little boys in the village under a mango tree, Sunday School class, the story of David and Goliath. And she went to Moody Bible Institute. She was going on and on the way she'd been taught. She said, "This is the story of a little boy and a lot of faith." And all of us little marksmen were sitting with slings thinking, "No, no. We don't think so. We think that's a story of a very stupid giant who let a little boy with one of these get that close." And I used to lie in my bed at night thinking, "I could have done that." He's 9 feet tall. She said, his forehead was as big as a dinner plate. And I thought, "How could you miss?" We actually found, he's not even moving, he was seriously outgunned and he didn't even know it. We actually found a palm tree and we shimmied up to the 3' mark which is about 9 feet. Carved out a little wedge that we thought was the size of his head. And we used to just kill Goliath all day long. It got so it was not fair to stand there. You had to be running as you shot. And then I remember the one day, the palm tree just went, boof. Too many little boys, too many rocks and the tree cam a tumbling down.

By the time I was 15 years old and came to America, I was a fully trained peasant farmer. Could have raised my family on the Sahara Desert. More important than the skills, they taught me my values. They poured themselves into me. They shaped my spirit. They shaped my character. And I learned from the poor. I used to say, "Everything I needed to know to lead Compassion's

worldwide ministry I learned from the poor in that little village.” They taught me about love. No matter how poor you are, you can still have love. And the more of it you give away, the more of it you get. What an amazing commodity love is. They taught me about joy. That joy is not dictated by circumstances. Joy is the decision you make about how you’re going to relate to what’s going on in your life. Same thing with hope. We tend to be hopeful when we have more assets than liabilities. Other way around for the poor all the time. But they learned to hope in each other. They learned to hope in the village. They learned to hope in Jesus. When they take the Jesus road is how they said giving their lives to Christ. They taught me about how to be generous. They taught me how to give, how to receive. They taught me that time is your servant, not your master. All we did was go by the sun. We never wore a watch. I didn’t see a watch until I was 15. They taught me about generosity, how to give. The worst thing you can be in that little poverty-stricken village was selfish. And the worst thing you could have done to me as a little guy would have been to give me two pieces of candy. I would have looked and seen them in my hand and said, “OK, one probably, but surely not both. Now what am I going to do with all of these friends and only one piece of candy?” You cannot out give God, Central. And you cannot out give the poor.

I learned if God made you strong, it’s not for you. It’s for you to be there for those who are weak. And if God made you courageous, that’s not for you either. It’s for you to be there for those who are frightened. And that’s how my life was shaped in that little village. But we were, I have to admit, we were poor. Nothing, nothing could go wrong or somebody starved. I remember when I was about 6 years old, the plague of locusts came off the Sahara Desert. The sky was black with grasshoppers and they came down and they landed in our corn fields. And we went out there with switches and tried to drive them off. They were on the ground for 2 hours. When they finally took off, they took everything green with them. All of our corn. All of our crops. All of the grass. The migrating animals moved away. The swamp dried up. And for a year us and my village all we ate was bugs. We ate termites. If you ever want to try that; raw, still walking around your mouth, they taste like peppermint. If you put them on a little fire and roast them, they taste like popcorn. For a whole year, that’s all we ate. The next year came and it was an important year in my life. I’m 7 years old. We’re all pretty weak from not having much to eat, when an epidemic of measles swept through our village. Measles. That should keep you out of school, maybe, for a few days. But it was a killer because we were weak. And in two weeks’ time, one out of every four of my little buddies in that village died. Measles. And I remember running to my father, he was translating in a hot, tin shed, I’ll never forget. And he looked up and he saw I as skinny as a rail as a little guy. He saw his skinny little son standing there and I said, “Daddy when do you think it will be my turn?” And he said, “Your turn for what, Wess?” I said, “My turn to die, Daddy. All my friends are dying. When do you think I’ll die?” And I’ll never forget. He put his pen down and he said, “Son, you don’t have to worry about this. You’re not going to die from this.” And I said, “How do you know?” And he said, “Well roll up your t-shirt.” I rolled it up. And he says, “Those little scratches on your arm, those are called vaccinations. You got those in America before you came here so you wouldn’t get this kind of disease.” And Central, I came to a moment that changed my whole life. I will never forget that moment. I’ve written a book called Just A Minute. And in it I say, if God stands a child in front of you for just a minute, it might be a divine appointment. One minute can transform the life of a child. I think I became Compassion’s president at age 7 in this minute. Because when he said, “You don’t have to worry because you’ve got scratches on your arm.” I remember slamming my hand down and saying, “Papa that’s not fair. Why don’t all of my friends have scratches on their arms. Why me?” Imagine my joy

becoming Compassion's president like 50 years later and putting scratches on the arms of hundreds of thousands of children every year. I know where that came from.

By the time I was 15 and came to America finally, half of all my little childhood buddies had died. And I thought if I saw it in the animal kingdom, the young and the old are vulnerable, I thought that's how it is everywhere. And then I come to America. First place I see in America is New York City. Can you imagine going from that dusty little village to Manhattan? And my first day in America, which is where that book *Too Small To Ignore* actually begins and then backtracks. I'm walking around New York City and I'm 15 years old. I'm about 6-foot-tall at that point. And I can see people carrying brown paper bags and I look inside and I see it's food. So being a pretty darn good little hunter, I backtrack it. Where's that coming from? And I come to my first grocery store and I walk in there and here's all this food. And suddenly it hits me. There's plenty of food. Nobody needed to starve. There's plenty of food. I poked my head next door, there was a pharmacy. And in my broken English I said, "What all this?" And they said, "Well it's medicine." And with a trembling heart, I said, "Do you have vaccination?" And he says, "Oh, yeah. We don't sell to little guys like you, but we have it in the freezer in back. We sell it to doctors and clinics." Plenty. And suddenly it hit me at age 15. None of that needed to happen in my village. Nobody needed to die. There's plenty of medicine. There's plenty of food. And I went out in front of that store with that new reality in my head and I just sat down and just wept. And I wept and I wept. A whole childhood of tears and now I realized it didn't need to happen. It was New York City so as you can imagine, nobody even stopped to say, "Are you OK little guy?" I eventually ran out of tears. Now I'm starting to watch these people walk by in these fancy shoes, these watches, these purses, and I'm like, "What is wrong with you people? You have all of this and you don't care." And I went into a rage that lasted all through my high school years. I just couldn't wait to get out of America and back to my village. But once I had lived in America for a while, I began to have an opening. I learned the language. I learned the culture. And I came to the reality. It isn't that these people don't care; these people don't know that was going on. And when they do know, they really, really care. They might be the most generous people in all of the world. And I thought, "OK. So somehow my life has got to bridge these two groups of people. I know the poor. I know what, I know their needs. But I know their strength and their values. And now I know these precious people, they may have some money in their pocket, but they need love and they need hope, and they need joy. These people need each other." And I thought somehow my life has got to bridge these worlds. And I thought, "Well I've got to become an ambassador. I've got to become, work at the United Nations or something." When I stumbled as a student at Moody Bible Institute myself, I stumbled into this little storefront about the size of a 7-11. And it said, Compassion International. And I walked in and just like the pharmacy, I said, "What all this? What do you do?" And they said, "Well our enemy is poverty. And what we do is we fight it by bridging the world between the poor and those who can help them. And we've discovered that it's an amazing two-way street." And I thought, "You know what. What sounds awfully familiar to me. And that was 41 years ago. I said, "You know what, I'm throwing my hat in the ring. I'm going to help build this thing as big as it can be, as good as it can be." And in 41 years now I have not looked back.

So this organization that I have given my life to, 65 years old now, founded in 1952, a million graduates of our program, sponsored by people like you, are now the pastors, the teachers, the doctors, the nurses, all across 26 countries where we live. Picture this. I was at Kyle Field

yesterday. How many of you went to that ball game? Yeah, none of you have voices do you? No. I said, "Do not yell as you have to talk tomorrow." You could fill that stadium 10 times over with the graduates of Compassion International who are now blessing back into their communities. I joined it when it was 25,000. Now it's a million, nine-hundred thousand sponsored children. Each linked to a caring, loving adult, a sponsor. Actually sponsorship was Jesus' idea. The Good Samaritan was the first sponsor, Luke chapter 10. The government had passed this wounded guy by, the church had passed him by, along comes an ordinary person, does a very smart thing. He takes him to an inn and he says to the innkeeper, "Hey, you've got the facilities, you've got the expertise, you've got the time. I'll make a deal with you. You take of this man for me, but I'll pay." These were Jesus' words. He even went so far to say how much he'd pay. Two silver coins is what he said. And then he ended the story. Go do the same thing. And that's what a million, nine hundred thousand of you say to Compassion every day. Take care of this little guy. I will write letters. I will pray. I can find \$38 a month to fund everything you're doing in this little child's life. But you do it.

It's been said all that's necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing. And I've discovered that good people do nothing for only two reasons. The first one is they don't know what to do. And the second, they know who to trust. So what we've done at Compassion is we've come up with something that any of us can do. Every family can say, "We can reach out to one little guy. Maybe not change the whole world, but we could change the whole world for one of these little guys." And who to trust. So Compassion has worked for all these years to be a place of integrity. We think if you lack integrity, you lack everything. Charity Navigator lists Compassion for the last 14 straight years, their highest rating putting us in the top 1%. More exciting to me than that is that 9,000 of our sponsors went overseas last year and met their child face to face. I don't know about you, but that sounds like the best audit trail there is. We're talking today, here at Central, about sponsoring children in Honduras in order for this church to build a relationship with that country. And we're talking about getting groups of you together, go down, and meet them. Maybe some of them come up here. Build a bridge between Central and Honduras. Compassion works with 7,000 churches in 26 countries. Absolutely committed to the local church. And as Chris saw, there's no signs of Compassion on our vehicles. We don't wear it on our t-shirts. When we go in to work in a church, if anybody's going to get thanked, we want it to be that local body of believers. And we want the people of that community to say to the local Christians, "What is it about you people? Why do you care about my child?" And it gives the church the chance to shine in the midst of its community having lived out the gospel. Saint Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel everywhere you go and, if necessary, use words." And that's what's going on all across the ministry.

I can tell you this, and I know your heart for this, 434 children across Compassion's ministry will accept Jesus Christ as their Savior today. Happened yesterday. Will happen again tomorrow. By the next time you gather in this sanctuary next Sunday, look around you. The number of children who will accept Jesus Christ as their Savior this week would fill every seat in this auditorium. Only God can do that. That means 158,000 of them accepted Christ as their Savior last year. I was sitting at Kyle Field yesterday looking at that crowd and I thought, "Every year we would fill this entire stadium with children who've accepted Christ." Now the task, and this is where you come in, and we need your help on this. Is to disciple them. To help them know God's love. To learn how to reach their full God-given potential and change their world. You see the worst thing

about poverty is not water and hygiene and sanitation and housing. Those are symptoms of poverty and it's good to eradicate them, I suppose. But why do good when you can do kingdom good? And so what we do is we bring these little ones, what poverty says to a little child 3 and 4 years old is, give up, nobody cares about you, nothing can ever change. These little kids making bricks. We had these two little 11-year-olds, we actually got in there and helped them make, they went to school in the morning and then they made bricks all afternoon. And Satan gets in there and says, "Nothing will ever change. There's no reason to hope. This is your life." And you can just see the sparkle go out of these little one's eyes. Made in the image of God, but the glory is diminishing. And what we do with Compassion, that little local church and a sponsor all the way across the world, is we say to the little one, "Don't you believe that lie. God knows you. He knows your name. He knows how many hairs are on your head. The pattern of your fingerprints. Don't you dare believe that. You matter. You matter to us as a local church. You matter to me as a sponsor. Don't give up." When a child begins to think, "Hmmm. Maybe I do matter." You're on the road out of poverty. And the beauty is, we get them programs where they can win and succeed at things. And the next step is if I matter, then what I think matters, right. And we say, "Yes, sweetheart, what are you thinking? Can you paint it on this easel? Can you play it on this guitar? Can you write it in a letter to your sponsor? What's going on inside your head? We want to know." It's fun to watch them because little success upon little success over the years in that are in Compassion, you can see them when they finally get to be adolescents. They've experienced a lot. They know their worth. They know what they can do. And they usually, you've got teenagers, you know how this is. They say, "OK. I'll tell you what I think. I don't think my community should look like that. I don't think people should treat anybody like that. And you see that over there? That's wrong. And I think I can fix that." When a child goes from I can do nothing. I am a victim. There's no hope for me. To I can change my world. You have just won the war on poverty. And Central, the thing that's so cool is it begins with the love of God and it ends with the love of God lived out.

Let me close with one example of this. Think about this and think if you could do what this lady did, you should probably be one of our sponsors. Little guy joined Compassion a while back as a little one. The first picture that was sent to his school teacher in England, he wrote in the next letter, "You can see from the picture of me that I'm not really very handsome." Well she wrote back and she says, "I totally disagree. I got your picture on my desk in my classroom. I look at you every day. I think you're a very handsome young guy." He says, "Well." A few months later he writes, "Well now you can see from my report card, I'm not all that smart." It was a little hard on her as a teacher, but she says, "You know what, you're as smart as you need to be to be whatever God wants you to be. So just do your best." He begins to believe in himself. And at age 8 he now writes to her and he says, "Well guess what. I can run faster than anybody in my classroom. I won the blue ribbon." And she rights back, "Wow! It's good to be good at something. Look at you go. If you can run, run." So he runs. And a few years later he writes again and he says, "Well now I run faster than anybody in my school." And she writes, "I'm so proud of you. It sounds like you've found something you can do." So now he runs to church, he runs to school, he runs to the store. A few years later he writes and he says, "Well guess what now? I run faster than almost anybody in Kenya. I'm on the Olympic team. And he ran in the Olympics in Korea and was routed back by way of England to meet his sponsor face to face. And she had now retired, she could no longer walk, her legs had gone weak, and she was in a wheelchair. And this big, tall Kenya marathoner comes to her, her little cottage. He has to stoop to get inside. He holds up his

Olympic medal and he says, "This is for you." And she said, "No, no, no, no, no. I watched you run on television this time. You're so fast. I'm just so proud of you. And he said, "No, stop. If you hadn't believed in me when I was 8 years old and told me to run, I never would have run. This is your victory." And guys, if you could write a letter, if you could pray a prayer, if you could encourage a child like that, I urge you to join us in the battle for these little ones. It's a two-way street. You will find yourself far more blessed than you can possibly bless others.

So that's what we do. And that's what we're here to do today. You'll see tables out there. We would love for you to join Compassion's family. Now you know my battle. Now you know my mission. Now you know what I care about. The question I have, I guess, as I close is, so what's yours? Everybody needs a cause. A cause that's not about you. A cause that's outside of you. A cause that can move you to tears in 30 seconds. Either tears of great sorrow at the need that needs to be addressed. Or tears of great joy at the victories. And if you don't have a cause such as that, I beg you, don't live like that. This is a campsite. We're not here that long. Find something, it doesn't have to be mine, although it would be very cool if it was, join me in this cause for children. Find something that stirs your heart, throw yourself into it with all that you have, something that's worthy of your time and your talent and your treasure.

So my prayer for you is the same as my prayer for myself. And that is you will find your cause. Like I say, I wasn't a rocket scientist. God had to make my cause very, very clear to me. But I hope that you will find your cause. I hope you will find your purpose, your passion, your calling. And that you will throw yourself into it with everything that you have. In the midst of what it is you're doing, in the midst of giving, in the midst of serving a meal, in the midst of a prayer, in the midst of writing a letter to a little Kenyan boy, in a moment in a twinkling of an eye, when you least expected, scriptures tell us, a trumpet blast and we will all look up and the sky will roll back like a scroll and we will finally go home. Praise God! Home where there is no more death. Home where there is no more sickness. Where there is no more sorrow. Not even any more tears. Revelation 21:4, God says, "I reserve the right to wipe the last tears from their eyes." You realize what that means? The hands that knit you in your Momma's womb are waiting to wipe the tears from your eyes. That means the hands that picked you up when you broke your heart and you didn't think you could go on are waiting to wipe the tears from your eyes. It means the hands that took the nails on the cross to redeem you are waiting, waiting to wipe the tears from your eyes. And I don't know about you, I cannot wait, I am not walking into the arms, I'm going to run into the arms of my Lord and my Savior, my King and my Redeemer, and I cannot wait for Him to wipe the tears from my eyes. Way too many tears for one lifetime. But, oh, as He wipes the tears from my eyes, I hope that He notices also he has to wipe the sweat from my brow. Because I lived the life that He called me to live. I spoke up for those who couldn't speak for themselves. I fought for the least of these. I was kind to the poor, like you, until I was suddenly and wonderfully interrupted by Heaven. Oh, Central, may it be true for me and may it be true for you. And if I don't see you again down here, I will see you up there. And bring a lot of children with you. In Jesus name. Amen.