

The Conscientious Gringo

By

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Author Biography

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Introduction

Where the idea was born

Take the chicken bus north from Tegucigalpa, Honduras for about 35 minutes and soon you will descend into a beautiful area called the *Valle de Amarateca*. You will notice thousands of pine trees, green scrub brush and pockets of identical houses scattered about the valley. Billows of smoke rise from the Café Indo coffee processing plant on the right and the Café Maya plant on the left. The smell is inviting on a calm day. Soon you are in the lowest part of the valley where streaks of brown reveal the dirt roads that wind their way up into the mountains well worn by foot, tire, and hoof. You will turn left on the last dirt road--the one before you head up the mountain on the other side. Remember to hold onto the seat in front of you to avoid hitting your head on the roof due to the dips and bumps. Climb around the cow pastures and follow the sign up the hill to Divina Providencia. There, workers cutting grass will stop and wave or nod wondering who is entering their community. If they know you they will shout with a raised hand “*compa*” or “*tio*” endearing names that remind you of the friendship you maintain. Notice the skinny dogs and roaming cattle on the road and as you enter the community you will see a microcosm of the glory and sadness that is Honduras. People laughing alongside burning trash, kids playing barefoot with a flat soccer ball, abandoned cars alongside beautiful gardens, and gentle smiles that turn into growls when talking about politics. In this country, the third poorest in the Western Hemisphere by most standards, life is both simpler and more complicated than in the U.S.

This book was outlined on a similar bus trip while I was a Fulbright fellow in Honduras in 2010. I have spent more than twenty years doing development work: building houses in Mexico, working at an orphanage in Honduras, starting a non-profit to donate soccer equipment to orphaned and underprivileged children throughout the world, and so on. Reflecting on these experiences, I have gathered twelve lessons I wish I would have known before traveling abroad. I hope this book, through critical questions and fun vignettes, will help you become a conscientious agent of social change in the world.

Social change, development, and volunteer work

This book is focused on social change, which is a major goal for most development or volunteer work. When non-governmental organizations or churches engage in development work abroad, the aim is to help improve peoples’ lives by micro-financing women’s cooperatives, building a school or opening a clinic in a rural area. Volunteer work often has similar goals, but has a more limited timeframe such as building a well, constructing homes, or participating in a medical brigade.

Both development and volunteer work aspire to serve those in need by working to change society or address a social problem. Taking this commonality as a starting point, I hope that, no matter what you call your efforts, this book will make the experience more rewarding.

Sources of inspiration

The questions in the following chapters are not new. Indeed, they are drawn from some of the best work in the social sciences and from theories about critical thinking and pedagogy. The experiences and stories throughout the book aren’t just theoretical, though. They are real life experiences (though some names have been changed), drawn from dozens of friends and colleagues engaged in social change--from poor urban schools in the U.S. to the border of Swaziland to a large orphanage in Honduras. I hope to offer you an understandable and empowering guide to enlighten your adventure in helping others.

Most of the great philosophical and religious teachers in the world used stories and parables that people could relate to articulate their point. Drawing on this method, I hope you can put yourself in the shoes of the Global Northerners¹ who are telling the story and ask yourself how you would react in the same situation. What is it that we can distill from their experience in order to have a different (or the same) result?

Some assumptions about you

To start us off on an equal footing, I will make some assumptions about you, the reader. I assume that you are traveling not only for pleasure but to also engage in service to the people who live in the area. I also assume that you believe that people are unsatisfied with the way their life is (which may at times be a wrong assumption—sometimes we project our values onto others) and you feel called to serve them in some way. This is honorable and I commend you for choosing to volunteer. As Martin Luther King Jr. once noted in his famous “Drum Major” speech, “Anyone can be great because anyone can serve.” Finally, throughout the book I assume that you will be engaged in helping a community (rather than an individual or an institution), as this is the most common type of social change effort. No matter the project I believe all of the questions can be broadened or narrowed to fit most situations.

Organization

This book is organized using short quotes, vignettes, questions, and challenges. The quotes are meant to connect the chapter points to the counsel of wise social change leaders, while the vignettes ground the ideas and questions in real life situations. Through all of these, I hope to encourage you to critically examine yourself through the questions, reflections, and stories in this book. The challenges are meant to stimulate thought and action. Use these challenges as an icebreaker with new friends and colleagues during a break at work or while relaxing back at your temporary home. Who knows, you just may learn something from each other. For most people, spending about ten minutes a day reading and ten minutes a day reflecting and writing will give an excellent starting point for continued consciousness-raising.

What this book is not

This is not a book to criticize or emphasize the benefits or drawbacks of different development strategies. There are thousands of academic articles and hundreds of books that contain excellent critiques of development theories, some of which are presented in the appendix. Indeed, this book is not about strategies at all. It is about self-growth and the ability to connect with others on a deeper level.

This is also not a book full of answers. A wise university professor once noted to his students, “Knowledge will never be yours unless you wrestle with it, question it, and finally make peace with it.” I hope that you find the questions in this book difficult and challenging. If so, you will not only advance on the great quest “to know thyself,” but you will also find your experience greatly enriched as you travel.

Finally, this book is not one to be left on the shelf at home while you are on your trip or to be read quickly after a long day of work. Like most things in life, the more seriously you engage the questions asked in this book the greater your growth will be.

A word of caution

Sadly, sometimes as Global Northerners arrive in a poverty-stricken, less-educated, or less-clean country, they feel more entitled than those they are going to serve. Indeed, students

¹ I will use Global Northerners to refer to all those above who live above the Tropic of Cancer. These countries are also known as developed nations. I will use Global Southerners to refer to those living below the tropic of cancer. Please see map in the appendix for details.

and even adults on every trip I have taken often criticize differences in cultural practices, styles, and people. Some even feel that they have nothing to learn from their brothers and sisters in the Global South. They are wrong. As will be explored later in the book, we have as much if not more to gain from an experience abroad than perhaps those we are serving.

Chapter 1.

Reflection 1: Why are you going?

There are dozens of reasons for choosing to go on a trip to a country in the Global South. Perhaps you want to learn another language or maybe you are looking for a break from the mundane and some fun and adventure abroad. Perhaps you feel called to give of yourself to others or to build your resume or school application. None of these reasons are wrong and none are necessarily better than any of the others. What is important is how this shapes your experience. Understanding *why* you are going will make a major difference in what you come away with at the end of the trip.

There was a young woman, Karina, who needed a break from the nine-to-five office job that was wearing her down. Her sister, Dani, was working at a small orphanage for the summer and Karina thought that visiting her sister and the kids would be just what she needed to re-gain perspective. “It will be so fun to travel with my sister throughout Central America,” she thought. What she didn’t realize was what the universe had in store for her.

When Karina arrived, she fell in love with the children. She loved playing with them, sharing meals with the girls, and tickling the boys. Her favorite part, though, was reading books to the babies at night. Soon, her extravagant travel plans were tossed out the window and replaced with two weeks of singing to, eating with, and caring for the children. She did all of this without even knowing the language!

Yet, all too soon the time arrived when Karina had to return to cold Seattle and the job she had almost forgotten about. She had learned much about herself and Central America in the short time she was there. After she returned home, the desire to go back continued to nibble at her. She had a hard time feeling like just another cog in the machine back in the office without really benefiting the world. True, she had a great income but nothing to really *live* for.

The following summer Karina returned to volunteer at the orphanage. She stayed on a second year and later became the director of a new orphanage that was just being developed in Bolivia.

Although Karina originally left for Central America with the goal of taking in the sights, she was open to the love of the children and found herself called to serve for an indefinite period. No matter the reason for traveling, being open to what the people and experiences offer will make the trip all the more valuable for yourself and for those you meet.

Numerous people throughout history have been called to do something great with their lives. Mahatma Gandhi led an exploited sub-continent to political freedom, Mother Teresa saved hundreds of thousands of children and offered a respectful death to the poor, Wangari Maathai assisted women in planting more than 20 million trees, while here in the U.S. Martin Luther King Jr. empowered millions of African-Americans to take their seat at the table of equality. Learn from the experiences of those great people before you who maintained openness to change and challenge. Allow yourself to listen, see, smell, and feel your experience. Look for opportunities to enhance your understanding through all of your senses and from all of the people you meet. I promise you will always gain more than you expect.

Questions for Reflection

1. Write a short list of reasons why you are going on this trip. How do you think this may influence how you interact with your group and those you are trying to help?
2. What do you think you will get out of this trip? What are you looking forward to the most?

3. What are your concerns about going?

Challenge:

Before you leave, speak to a group leader or colleague about any concerns as well as positive expectations you have about the trip. Utilize these people as an opportunity to share your thoughts before, during, and after the trip. Think about how your concerns and expectations change over time.

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 2.

Reflection 2: What are your assumptions about the people, place, and culture where you will serve?

It is a common practice to critique others for their differences. This is even easier when the other person has different cultural values and standards. These differences, however, do not give any one of us the right to speak negatively about that person, culture, or community. As the following story will illustrate, our assumptions and judgments can misguide our good intentions.

There was once a young man, Santiago, who had the opportunity to visit Nicaragua after volunteering in El Salvador for a year. He decided to take a bus to Managua, the capital, with the goal of learning more about the revolutionary history of the country and to see why it had had such a tumultuous past. On the bus ride from El Salvador, Santiago daydreamed about what Nicaragua would be like. He remembered various movies he had seen, such as the one where an American soldier had to fight through hundreds of guerillas in the jungle in order to save innocent hostages. “Nicaragua,” thought Santiago, “must be full of jungle, danger, and armed revolutionaries.” He could not have been more wrong.

Much of Nicaragua is dry and arid, a revolutionary shot had not been fired in more than two decades, and people were very welcoming to the strange gringo. Indeed, throughout his journey he was invited to stay, eat, and spend time with kind Nicaraguans who he did not know and perhaps would never see again.

Psychologists have found that people create generalities and categories in order to make sense of the overwhelming amount of information they are bombarded by in the world. However, sometimes these categories can be based on biased or wrong information especially when ideas are generalized from only a few pieces of information. A simple example is the following. Take a piece of paper and write down the first ten adjectives that come to your mind when you think of Africa. Go ahead. Now, say you wrote down arid, poor, and full of disease. Your characterization, as you may already know, are not wrong but incomplete. There are many places in Africa that has significant annual rainfall like Cameroon, has great material and resource wealth like Nigeria, and do not have problems with disease like Morocco. In fact, Africa is larger than the U.S., China, India, and many European countries combined! Therefore, we must be careful of the mental cloak we place over the people we meet. Just as we know from experiences in our own communities, although people may share some common cultural characteristics, we cannot generalize and say that everyone is the same. Rather, a best practice may be to meet people where they are, to listen to them, to watch how they act, and then to judge accordingly.

The Good Samaritan parable highlights this point. A Jewish man is robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the side of the road. A priest and a Levite, Jews in good standing in the community, pass him by for fear that it may be a trap. A third man from Samaria, a nation despised by Jews, gives aid to the man, saving his life. It was the least likely of the three, the unclean foreigner who chose to help the man. Of the three it was the least likely, the foreigner who was prejudiced against, who chose to help the man. By turning the assumptions upside down, the story illustrates that we cannot judge other people by their background, but rather by their actions.

We do not know what is behind a face, a culture, a religion, or an attitude. Let us not jump quickly to judgment of those we are there to serve because they do things differently (or we think they do things differently!).

Questions

1. How do you generalize and categorize people and places? How do you think this may affect your interactions with the people you are there to serve?
2. What are your judgments about the place where you are going? Where do these come from?
3. Why do you believe the people in the place you are going need help?
4. Why do you think the country or place has not been able to develop like the U.S.? Is the U.S. the best development model to follow? Why or why not?

Challenge:

Take out a piece of paper and write all of the things that you have heard about where you are going. It may be something a family member or friend said or something you saw on TV or in a movie. Then share these ideas with someone who has been to that place and met those people. How similar or different is your understanding of the place you will visit? What does that show you? (Be conscious that this person has only his/her vantage point as well.)

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 3.

Reflection 3: Do the people you will serve need your help? If so, why?

An American businessman was standing at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellow fin tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish. "How long it took you to catch them?" The American asked. "Only a little while." The Mexican replied. "Why don't you stay out longer and catch more fish?" The American then asked. "I have enough to support my family's immediate needs," the Mexican said. "But," the American asked, "What do you do with the rest of your time?" The Mexican fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a siesta with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos. I have a full and busy life, señor."

The American scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds you buy a bigger boat, and with the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats, eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you would sell directly to the consumers, eventually opening your own can factory. You would control the product, processing, and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then Los Angeles and eventually New York City where you will run your expanding enterprise."

The Mexican fisherman asked, "But señor, how long will this take?" To which the American replied, "15-20 years." "But what then, señor?" The American laughed and said, "That's the best part. When the time is right you would announce an IPO (Initial Public Offering) and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich--you would make millions." The Mexican amazed inquired, "Millions, señor? Then what?" The American replied slowly, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take a siesta with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos..."

To create social change, you should first understand your own ideas about why inequality exists in the world and how you can address this problem. There are no wrong or right answers necessarily, although we should examine our explanations of inequality critically before accepting them as facts. Understanding your assumptions (or not) will significantly shape how you interact with those you are going to serve. The following paragraphs highlight common beliefs about why inequality exists. Whether or not you fit into one of these perspectives, it is important to think through why you believe what you do.

The social sciences have three different theories about why people are in need of help. First, **essentialists** believe that certain groups are inherently (biologically) lazy, dumb, do not follow directions, etc. and therefore do not have the capacity or will to work for wealth or to improve their lives. This was a common belief up until the middle of the twentieth century when data revealed that there really are no biological (genetic) differences between human being in characteristics such as intelligence and physical ability.

It is apparent that this assumption was based on uncritical prejudices. This perspective does not take into account how history has shaped the current situation, how people continue to gain off the poverty of others. Indeed, historically this one explanation helped to justify systems of oppression such as slavery, colonialism, and the denial of what we believe are now basic human rights (e.g. voting, equal education, health care). The inheritance of these past inequalities continues to affect people's opportunities throughout the world.

A second explanation began with a U.S. government report concerning African-American families in urban areas who were stuck in poverty generation after generation. The Moynihan Report has been called the **cultural construction argument**, but has also been referred to as: culture of poverty, welfare dependency, cycle of deprivation, and the underclass. This perspective basically argues that people are poor because they are resigned to their fate and lazy,

rather than hard-working or self-reliant. These negative values are passed from generation to generation thereby maintaining the family in poverty. In short, people are poor because they have been taught to be lazy and dependent on others, especially the government. From this perspective, it is a cultural (rather than a biological or structural) hurdle that the poor must overcome. Sadly, even today church groups, directors of development organizations, and students maintain beliefs about the “backward” culture of others. Perhaps the most common example is the view that it is the fault of the poor for being poor. If only they would (work harder, not be corrupt, better their education, etc.), they could develop and be like the Global North. While there may be cultural elements that slow progress, the cultural construction argument does not tell the whole story.

A final theory concerning why people continue to suffer from poverty is the **structuralist explanation**. This argument focuses on the structural conditions—poor economic opportunities, class conflict, social isolation, mass incarceration, lack of education—that some communities or groups face that hold them back from achieving success. Structuralists look for society-level external pressures that hold people back. Rather than “blaming the victim” as the two previous arguments propose, this approach views the poor as protagonists being limited by their environment.

This theory has been criticized for leaving individual responsibility out of the equation. Critics note that even if all structural opportunities were equal, there would still be some who succeed and some who do not. It is up to the individual to pull themselves up by the bootstraps. Proponents however counter with the tongue-in-cheek rebuttal, “And what if the individual has no boots to pull themselves up by?” meaning that some people are in such desperate straits that they cannot, without help and changes in the system, lift themselves out of poverty. In sum, structuralists see that broader “structures” such as employment, education, political agency, racism, unequal opportunities, etc. as the real culprits that maintain poverty.

So, in your opinion, why are people poor? And what method do you see as being the most worthwhile in confronting issues of inequality? Also, what is the focus of your trip? Is it health-related issues, economic development, building infrastructure, social development, or spreading the gospel? What do you see as the need of people where you are going? These questions not only shape your service agenda, they also shape how you view and treat the people you are there to serve.

Throughout history we have seen many different efforts at social change. Sometimes they have created more problems than they solved. However, I believe there is no one right way nor has there been a particular church that has had dramatically better success than any other. So whether you are proclaiming the word in the street, handing out mosquito nets, working at an orphanage, or putting in a well, the most important point is that you are aware of why poverty exists and have critically examined how and why your work will be of benefit to those you are there to serve.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you believe people are poor?
2. How does this illustrate your view of people (i.e. what are the problems that keep people from getting ahead)?
3. Does this philosophy reflect your beliefs about poverty? If so, how?
4. Is there a way that your project can have both a short-term and a long-term impact on the community?

Challenge:

Choose one thing that you are going to do differently from now on to create positive change in the world. Write it down and put it somewhere you will see it every morning to remind yourself of this commitment.

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 4.

Reflection 4: What can you learn?

Along with understanding why we are going and the importance of being open to new experiences, we should also be mindful of what we can learn from those around us. A wise high school teacher and principal, John, once told me a story of some disadvantaged communities in Baja California, Mexico. Over the years, John would take kids down to these areas in Mexico to work alongside community members building houses. He told me that the community members were always so grateful to him for returning year after year with up to 80 youth motivated to improve the infrastructure of their community.

Yet, John would never take the compliment. He would tell them, “I do not do this for you. What we provide you is so small and insignificant in comparison to what you provide to us. Our kids come from such a protected area, a bubble where they do not see the realities of the Global South. They need to meet you, to hear your stories and to see your life so that they can return with some perspective on how the majority of the world really lives.” John believed that what the kids experienced and learned was far more valuable than the small houses they built.

A similar story also comes from Mexico, from the Lacandon jungle in the state of Chiapas. In the early 1980s, a college professor from Mexico City visited this area and saw the incredible poverty that was there. He was told about the exploitation of the indigenous people, the robbing of land by force, the lack of public social services including health and education. He saw firsthand the desperation and misery of thousands of families and knew he had to do something. The professor recognized that he had knowledge and talents that could serve the people well in the jungle. He went to the leaders of the communities and said that he could help them, he could find resources, and he could lead them out of their destitution.

As the story goes, the leaders smiled and told the professor that he must first learn from the people, live with the people, understand what they understand, and only then will they respect and listen to him. The professor agreed, thinking it would only be a few months or perhaps a year before he would be able to understand them. However, it took him over ten years of living in the jungle before he felt he understood the needs of the people. Everything he believed about the people changed and, rather than lead them, he chose to act as a subordinate spokesperson for what would be called the Zapatista movement, which has become one of the most successful nonviolent revolutions by an indigenous population. In the end, the professor realized that he had as much to learn from the people as he had to offer.

What we can learn from both of these stories is the need to recognize that we have as much to receive as to give. By being open and humble, not only are we changed but our work becomes that much more pertinent and oriented to the needs of the people. Lao Tzu, a famous Chinese philosopher once noted, “Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say ‘We have done this ourselves.’”

Questions for Reflection

1. What values do the people you are serving have that are different (perhaps better) than your own?
2. What can you learn from those around you during your service experience?
3. How can listening to those you are serving help improve your work?

4. Do you give yourself time and space to listen to those you are there to serve? How will you give yourself space during your time of service?

Challenge:

In your journal, list something you have learned unexpectedly each day. Then explain how this may change your understanding of the world or how it may change the way you act when you return home.

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 5.

Reflection 5: What can you change?

In my experience, the question for Global Northerners is not *if* but *how much* and *what kind* of social change we want to create. For most of us, it is not a matter of resources but rather a matter of will and inspiration that hold us back from taking on the challenges of poverty, abuse, hunger or the myriad of other problems in the world. Indeed, we have particular advantages and opportunities that most people in the world and in history never had. This reflection will hopefully help us think about the type of change we can create as one of the select group of people who have vast opportunity to serve.

As a university professor, every morning I greeted my students by saying, “Good morning future leaders of the world.” I went on to explain their privilege to be able to attend the best high school in the richest city, in one of the richest counties, in the richest state, in the richest country in the world. Whether they realized it or not, they had more opportunity than just about any of the 6.8 billion people on earth to create positive change in the world—if they chose to do so. In comparison to a Guatemalan coffee picker, a Rwandan refugee, a Haitian earthquake survivor, a South African gold miner, or an Indian fisherman, we, as U.S. citizens, have many more opportunities to affect change on a global scale.

Think about all of the resources that Global Northerners have to create change. We have oceans of material wealth, networks of the most educated people in the world, access to wonderful libraries and free internet that can enable us to communicate and build a movement, generous foundations, supportive churches and institutions, a value system that encourages helping those in need, and the freedom to travel throughout the world. Just thinking about your own life today, think how many of these privileges are available to you and how you can affect positive change, if you really want to.

Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” One example is the organization Get on the Bus, which has organized to bring children to visit their incarcerated mothers and fathers. In 2000, as part of a restorative justice project, Suzanne Jabro wanted to bring children to visit their incarcerated mothers on Mother’s Day. She believed that the visit would not only be beneficial to the children but would also give their mothers hope and a goal of being reunited with their kids. This one inspiration has spread exponentially over the last decade, leading to 44 of buses helping 1106 children visit their mothers in every woman’s prison in California, as well as a few men’s prisons. It only took an idea and the passion of one woman to affect positive change in the lives of thousands.

On a similar but more interpersonal level, a person never knows the impact he may have on another. An older teacher, Michael, was celebrating thirty years as part of the clergy and the parish decided to throw him a celebration. As Michael looked around, he thought about all the ways that he had been a part of these people’s lives—through birth, sickness, marriage, struggles, and death. He thought he knew how he had touched them, how he had influenced their lives in a small way by being available for their needs. As part of the celebration, parishioners were invited to get up and share a story of how Michael had helped or touched them. Dozens of people from small children to old grandparents crowded around the microphone each sharing their stories about this special man. However, a funny thing happened. Although Michael remembered all of their anecdotes, each was different than the ones he had remembered. Indeed, the times when he touched people were almost always the times when he did not realize it.

Michael realized that his impact was not so much in the larger events but rather in the continuous love and support he had given each person.

Lastly, drawing on the laws of physics, every action has an equal reaction. Every action has a consequence and it is either bettering the world or making it worse, even if it's in a tiny way. Michael was creating positive change when he was not aware of it, and you and I have that opportunity as well. We do not create social change only when we are on our week of service but right now within our families, with our friends, with the choices we are making to stay out late or get a good night sleep, criticize a friend or say something nice to her. In each action, we are changing the world for the benefit or detriment of humankind.

Perhaps the best quote to sum up this chapter was uttered by the famous non-violent political leader of India, Mahatma Gandhi. He told his followers to “*Be the change you wish to see in the world.*” We did not choose to be born privileged, as a leader of the world. We can, however, choose to use this opportunity to walk with and support those who do not have such privilege.

Questions for Reflection

1. How are you a future leader of the world?
2. What are the talents and privileges you have? How can these be used to affect social change in your family, in your community, and abroad?
3. How are you affecting change right now in the way you act and think?
4. How can you “Be the change you wish to see in the world?”

Challenge

Talk to a colleague or friend who is traveling with you. Ask them what kind of social change they want to make in the world and how they think they can affect that change. Then explain to him or her how you believe social change happens and how you want to affect positive change in the world.

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 6.

Reflection 6: What can you *NOT* change?

It is important to be realistic about how and what we can change in a particular place. Having ideals and shooting for the stars in our hope to help others is not a bad thing as long as it is rooted in the reality that we and the people we are serving live in. Two practical issues to be aware of to avoid disappointment are the slow process of change and how difficult this process is to control. The following story and sermon may give us some insight into how to deal avoid common feelings of frustration.

Change is slow. Ask any development worker and they will tell you that creating lasting change in people or social structures takes patience, constant energy, determination and resilience. Anyone who believes that there is a quick fix or panacea for any of the big issues the impoverished are facing have not spent enough time in the field. Northerners who believe that having a well, a house, or even a new hospital will solve the problems in a family or a community are often frustrated when they return to visit the same community a year later and little has changed. Similarly, non-governmental organization and social workers have also explained to me their own disillusionment as they throw themselves at a problem and yet see little of the suffering subside. Some begin to lose hope in humanity and become judgmental and angry. Their good intentions and efforts are lost in their disappointment.

The frustration from such a slow process of transformation can be augmented by a desire by Northerners to control the outcome. There is an expectation that when a project is done for a group of Southerners, their lives should be changed significantly. An example of this was when a Methodist group decided to build a new state-of-the-art large church for disaster survivors of Hurricane Mitch in Honduras. They believed that constructing a magnificent worship space would draw thousands of believers and that the church would thrive. Yet, millions of dollars later, the “castle” as it has been called by residents sits quietly on the hillside except on Sundays when a dozen people attend the one service. Although there were wonderful intentions behind this project, a beautiful church was not enough to convert the thousands of Catholic and evangelical residents in the community. As this example demonstrates, there are deep historical roots for most of the issues that we will confront in the South. Situations of poverty, disease, lack of medical care and clean water, etc. have taken decades if not centuries to create. It does not mean it cannot change—rather, it means that it might take just as long to do so.

Archbishop Oscar Romero was a champion of the poor in El Salvador. However, even though he was the most beloved man in the country for many years and millions of Salvadorans tuned into his Sunday sermons, he also recognized that no single person had the power to fix all of the problems in the country. Our job, he explained, is not to try to change everything, but instead to be a small part in a much bigger plan.

“It helps now and then to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said...No set of goals and objectives include everything. This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but

it is a beginning, a step along the way...We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

As the Archbishop explained so eloquently, we are workers and prophets of a future. We should not feel like we control the outcome of our work but rather trust that a higher power, the universe, karma, or whatever you may call it, will make the result of our well-intentioned efforts something beautiful and positive even though we may never see it.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the things you hope to change on this trip and what are the things you do not think you can change?
2. If you do not obtain your goal how will you feel?
3. If you see problems that are too big for you to solve, how will you deal with them? Is there a way that you can help from home or in the future?
4. Have you let go of control over the outcome of the project? Why or why not?

Challenge

Read about the place where you are going or talk to some of the locals and learn about the history of the country. In your journal, respond to the following questions: Why is that country poor? Why do some people have access to basics such as water, food, housing, transportation, and others live in dire situations? What keeps these people from having these things? And do your efforts address these problems?

AND/OR

Write about what it feels like to let go of controlling the results. Does trying to control the process help? Is it your process or their process or both? Why are you attached to certain results?

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 7.

Reflection 7: What may be the unintended consequences of your work?

One of the most important and yet least thought about questions for *Conscientious Gringos* concern the unintended consequences of their work. It is also one of the most difficult questions to address from home. The stories below will highlight how good intentions may provoke problematic side effects.

A U.S. government organization was working in various African countries and found that malaria was the largest health issue facing particular populations who lived near rivers. They knew a simple solution to malaria was mosquito nets as they prevented the passing of the virus. They began a campaign to donate bed nets for free to hundreds of thousands of people and at the end of the project they were satisfied with the job they had done. However, a follow-up study revealed that malaria had only slightly decreased in these areas. What they found was that the people who had received the nets sometimes did not understand what they were for and used them as clothing, for cooking (straining food), fishing nets, or that people would sell them to others. In short, although the organization had good intentions, their goals did not fit with those of the people.

The historical example of *cargo cults* also dramatizes unintended consequences. During World War II, isolated indigenous groups on various South Pacific islands encountered Japanese and American soldiers and were amazed by their technologically-advanced material goods such as tents, canned goods, cooking utensils, radios, etc. Most of this material was air dropped from planes and then shared with locals in order to create goodwill and allies. However, when the war was over and the shipments of goods stopped, these groups began their own rituals to entice the gods to continue dropping materials from the sky. The people built dirt landing strips and mock control towers, they would stand waving flags as the soldiers did and carved headsets of wood in which they would make similar gestures and sounds. Though not a goal of the U.S. military, cargo cults were an unanticipated result. Without the benefit of explanation, the people became dependent on foreigners who would never return.

A third story comes from a post-disaster community in Haiti. In building a community for the 2010 earthquake survivors, an NGO wanted to empower the people to take responsibility for various aspects of the community. They set up a democratic election process and believed the community was able to run itself. Unfortunately, after the elections the NGO noticed that the community had been essentially divided up into factions. One example was that one family had complete control over the sports complex and would only allow their friends to use the equipment. The unintended consequence was unequally shared power within the community.

A final example comes from Central America. Felix, a Methodist pastor, shared how U.S. Christian youth groups focused on converting citizens, sometimes creates a culture of opportunism. He explained, "When we have a Methodist group down to help with school or community projects, our small group of twenty parishioners quickly becomes two to four hundred. Once the gringos leave, we are back down to twenty. It is similar with the Catholics. When the Catholic gringo youth group comes the residents suddenly become Catholic." Though opportunism is not necessarily bad, *Conscientious Gringos* (whether religious or otherwise) should think about the possible negative effects of their work, such as dependency as residents wait for gifts provided by external groups.

This is not to say that your project will create a cult of some sort and a small child will begin mimicking your every move or that building a well will create water sharing inequity.

Rather, the effect of what we do may have a large and possibly unanticipated impact on the people we are serving. It is critical that we try to be aware of and think through the unanticipated consequences of our actions so that we may mitigate some of the possible negative side effects.

We cannot control what others do, but we can control how we do things and how thoughtful we are in what we do. We should ask ourselves how our work can align with the work of those people already creating change in the community. Do our goals match or conflict with their efforts? And do our efforts take into account what their needs actually are or what we think their needs are? At the end of the day, these folks will continue to be living and working in the community long after we have left. The most lasting change I have found happens when Global Northerners partner with local organizations, which have been working in the area for a long time and know the needs of the people. Partnering may help us have the longest term impact on the greatest amount of people, in the most responsible way possible. However, no matter how you interact with other organizations, the most important goal should be to connect with the people you are serving.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are possible negative consequences of your work in the community? How can you or the group mitigate these issues?
2. Could there be possible consequences for your work in six months, a year, five years, or ten years?
3. Will you be partnering with another organization? What is the relationship like between your group and the other group? Who makes the decisions about the project?
4. How will you know you have been successful at obtaining your goals?

Challenge

Write down the possible impacts your work may have on different individuals in the community: women, children, the elderly, etc. Do your goals empower or dis-empower these groups? Are they beneficial in the long run or may they create unanticipated problems? How do you think the community will change based on your participation?

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 8.

Reflection 8: What privileges do you take for granted?

To talk about privilege is to also talk about inequality. A basic definition of privilege is a special advantage, immunity or benefit enjoyed by some but not all. In short, to have an advantage means that someone must have a disadvantage. This is not to say that all privilege is bad or that we get to choose our privilege. We are born with most of them, such as wealth, citizenship, skin color, gender, physical ability, etc. What it does mean is that we should be mindful of our privilege and how it affects our relationship with others.

An example may help clarify this point. I have a friend, Sara, from Sweden. As a white young Swedish college student, she was invited to learn about racism and privilege in South Africa. Part of their experience was to visit various rich areas in Johannesburg and Cape Town as well as see the slums of the outlying areas. One day they visited a community in Swaziland, which is a small country made up of mainly Black-skinned descendents of the Swazi people, inside of South Africa. When the Swedish group arrived at the border, there was a huge line of people, mostly poor Black Swazis, trying to return home. The wait appeared to be hours. One of Sara's colleagues, another white Swede, asked the driver and guide if there was any way they could bypass this line and move directly to the front since they were there on an educational mission.

Although this may seem like a perfectly reasonable request, a number of questions concerning privilege arise. First, why does the young man think he has the privilege to move ahead of everyone else? Could it be because his work and time are so much more important than everyone else's agenda? Second, what about his background (education, wealth, race, citizenship, etc.) enables him to believe he is entitled to move to the front of the line? Third, if he believes he can cut in line, how does this influence how he thinks and acts toward others and his assumptions about his status in the world? Finally, does this student believe he is "better," "more important," or his time "more valuable" than others?

Sociologists refer to eight different types of privileges that act as benefits for some and disadvantages for others. These are: race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, citizenship and religion. For example, in the United States, advantages come from having white skin rather than being a person of color, wealthy rather than poor, male rather than female, heterosexual rather than homo- or bi-sexual, middle-age rather than young or old, a U.S. citizen rather than undocumented, and Christian rather than Muslim or of another faith. Life in the U.S. is easier for those who have these certain qualities and more difficult for others. In different countries and even in different parts of the U.S., privileges may be granted to different people, i.e. being Muslim in Saudi Arabia offers greater advantage than being Christian. Patricia Hill Collins refers to these eight types as a "matrix of domination" because these privileges combine to give certain people much larger advantages in life than others.

Dr. Derald Wing Su, a professor of psychology at Columbia University, explains privilege, specifically the privilege of being white, in this way: "I ask my students to imagine a foot race where all the white people get to line up fifty yards ahead of all the people of color. The race begins. The white people, who may have been training for months, indeed, run fast and hard. When they win the race they believe it is because of their own effort and skill. It does no good to deny that they worked hard and are meritorious. That is their subjective understanding of their positionality, and from within their group it makes sense. But objectively they had an unfair advantage, which they may or may not have seen or known about, though it becomes

increasingly difficult to explain how the white racers were so oblivious to their advantage. To admit that advantage, however, would necessitate changing the rules of the race itself, rather than addressing the case of one or two individuals, and the result would be a substantial change in the fortunes of the two groups.”

What this means is that many of us have particular advantages, especially over those who we plan to serve, such as education, wealth, travel opportunities, and even skin color. It is important to think critically about these advantages so that we do not unconsciously receive benefits that we may not deserve, or believe we are entitled to such benefits. Instead, we should think about how to use our privilege as a way to empower those we are there to serve.

Questions:

1. Which of the eight privileges do you have in reference to the people you are serving? What benefits do you receive from these privileges?
2. With privilege comes power. How do you use this power to tear people down or to build people up?
3. How does privilege create inequality?
4. Have you ever been the victim of inequality? How did that make you feel?

Challenge:

Tape the list of privileges that you wrote out for the first question next your bed. Look at it each morning and pick one that you are going to focus on. Make conscious choices throughout the day not to use that privilege but rather humble yourself, putting the needs of those you serve first.

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 9.

Reflection 9: What does the world look like through the other person's eyes?

One afternoon, a young economist led his students on a field trip to a poor village in Bangladesh during a severe famine. They interviewed a woman who made bamboo stools for a living, and learned that she had to borrow money to buy raw bamboo for each stool made. After repaying the middleman, sometimes at rates as high as ten percent interest per week, she was left with nearly no profit. She worked very hard but was barely surviving. Professor Muhammad Yunus put himself in the shoes of this woman and realized that the economic system he was teaching at the university did not work for the poorest of the poor. He therefore took \$27 of his money and lent it to 42 basket-weavers, which sparked what became the microcredit movement. Since his small loan in 1974, the movement has empowered millions of poor women in nearly 100 countries and providing more than eleven billion dollars in credit with a return success rate of 96.7 percent.

A second example concerns some of my university students. As an extra credit exercise I challenge them to do one of four activities for a week: be homeless, wear a dress (men), fast, obtain water from at least half a mile away, or move around in a wheelchair. Almost all of the students who participate in this exercise express how surprised they are in the ways that they are treated. Participants explain in a follow up paper that they felt more comfortable talking about the issue of poverty, crossdressing, cultural expressions, and disability. A few students even mentioned that they felt a kinship with the group when before they felt completely disconnected.

What these stories have in common is the effort of one person to deeply empathize with the situation of another. By stepping into the other's shoes, Professor Yunus and the university students were moved to act and in that action they created positive social change. In short, empathy is perhaps the greatest motivating force for good and is the foundation to any broad and lasting cultural change.

To conclude with the words of President Obama, *"You know, there's a lot of talk in this country about the federal deficit. But I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit -- the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through the eyes of those who are different from us -- the child who's hungry, the steelworker who's been laid-off, the family who lost the entire life they built together when the storm came to town. When you think like this -- when you choose to broaden your ambit of concern and empathize with the plight of others, whether they are close friends or distant strangers -- it becomes harder not to act; harder not to help."*

Questions for Reflection

1. How often do you put yourself in another's shoes?
2. How does seeing the world from the perspective of those you are serving enable you to serve them better?
3. Do you want people around you to try and see the world from your perspective? Why?

Challenge:

Try stepping back and putting on the shoes of the other whom you would like to help. From that vantage point, what are your needs, wants, and hopes? What are the barriers to your success? And how would you like to be treated by the volunteer gringos visiting you?

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 10.

Reflection 10: What are the long-term effects of your project on the community and yourself?

The usual answer to this question is “I don’t know.” On the community side, there is the generous estimate that if a group builds a well, it could help thousands of people for decades. There is the stingier estimate that perhaps something will go wrong with the well—a broken part, a lack of maintenance, infighting over who has control of the well— and it could last just a few months. The point is, we should try to think critically about how our efforts will impact the community not just in a superficial way (one well=clean drinking water for x number of people), but also in the many other ways and for a much longer time than we may expect. The effect on the person who goes to serve can range anywhere from an insignificant experience to an event that revolutionized her worldview. The following stories will explain why we should be thinking critically about the long-term effects of our work.

A director of a small house-building organization in Tijuana once told a group of students this story: “Last year, an NGO came down from the U.S. and built dozens of houses for the poor and then left. This year, the same people face a problem of water shortage. Rather than try to work on it themselves, they are waiting for the gringos to return and fix the water crisis for them. It is a problem in this country that good-intentioned Americans sometimes create dependency without even knowing it.”

I have seen a similar situation in Honduras. In October of 1998 Hurricane Mitch struck the country and hundreds of thousands of people lost their homes. There was a desperate need for temporary and eventually long-term housing for these people in low risk areas outside of the city. One organization was well organized and quickly built houses in a flood safe area which they called *La Colina*. However, once the houses were finished, the organization left and moved onto another housing project. Unfortunately, three factors--the lack of a continued NGO presence, a highly traumatized population, and a large gang problem--combined in *La Colina*. A gang took control of the area and forced the 355 families to pay a “war tax” to enter or leave the community. In addition, crime, drug trafficking, and murders became so common in the area that not even the police would enter. Although the organization had done something positive by building houses for disaster victims, their plan was short-sighted and had long-term negative consequences that could have been avoided.

On a more personal level, my friend Stephanie had this experience to share about leading a high school group: “As we were lugging cement buckets up to the roof of one of the houses we were helping to build in Tijuana, one of my students said, ‘Why can’t we just rent a cement truck to mix all of this cement for us and a crane to get the cement to the top of the roofs? ...It would be so much easier.’ One of my co-workers said, ‘What would that say to the families we’re helping?’ It’s not about how fast or how easy it is to build a home with the technology we have access to in the United States, it is about working hard with the tools the families have available to them. It is about working in solidarity...It is about the relationships we are building.”

What Stephanie wanted her students to understand was that building the house was only a secondary goal. The real goal was the long-term change that happens on the individual level by bringing two disparate groups together to learn from one another, work and sweat on the same project, and build lasting relationships. In addition, it was the hope of the leaders that the

privileged adolescents would recognize their privilege and in the future continue this type of service.

One way students have continued their service to a particular community is through maintaining a long-term relationship with those they met on their short-term project. With better communication technology this has become even easier. For example, at the orphanage where I volunteered each child has a few “godparents” in the U.S. or Europe who sponsor them for \$30 a month. The sponsors would occasionally send pictures or letters and the kids, feeling so attached to this person that they never met but that cared about them enough to send a letter, would keep the sponsor’s picture under their pillow and think about their godparent every night. Analogously, I recently visited a poor family in Honduras and on their wall were typical pictures of family and friends. What was not typical was to see a high school graduation picture of an American girl who had volunteered in their community for a week. The family explained that the girl had come with a youth group and that they were still in touch with her years later. These Hondurans had been so touched by the foreigners in their lives that they put their pictures in places of honor. The change these Global Northerners made, knowingly or not, has had a long-term positive impact.

In sum, we should think seriously about how our work can impact the community and ourselves in the future. We may not be able to stop community power struggles over water or the problem of dependency, but by having these issues on the forefront of our mind we will be in a better position to avoid them. Additionally, our work does not have to end when we get in the car or board the plane. By maintaining relationships, we can continue to positively affect and be affected by our international brothers and sisters.

Questions for Reflection

1. Will your work have a short-term, mid-term, or long-term effect on the area?
2. How can you work to ensure that your efforts have long-term positive impacts?
3. Is there any follow up or any type of evaluation to see whether your work has had the results that you wanted?
4. Is keeping in touch or connected with the community you worked with important to you? If so, how will you keep in touch?
5. How will you be changed by this project?

Challenge:

Speak with community members about what they see as the short-, mid-, and long-term effects of your work. Think creatively in how you can support the community not just now but also in the future.

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 11.

Reflection 11: How will you bring this experience home?

During and soon after such a dramatic experience many youth and adults have what is called a mountaintop experience where they feel good about what they have done and look forward to doing it again. This is a good thing. However, after a few weeks and the humdrum of “normal” life returns, ex-volunteers are quickly lulled into the same routines and habits that they had before. This is not to say that they have not changed, but rather that they re-acclimated to their old ways and the change they had hoped for and felt a part of becomes almost imperceptible. The question is, how do we maintain a fire for service once we return home?

Over the years, I have seen a spectrum of post-experience responses upon return. On one side of the spectrum are those who valued the opportunity to serve but did very little to change how they lived or never again participated in a similar project. On the other side, there are people who have a life-altering experience and return to the U.S. to start non-profits or are active in justice issues and spend the rest of their life fighting for a particular cause. Most people are somewhere in the middle.

Of course, it is not everyone’s calling to start a non-profit or spend their life working for others across the ocean. It is also not ideal to let this experience pass you by untouched. Therefore, one way to give continued breadth to your service is by reflecting on how it has touched and changed you. The more time you spend thinking about the differences of where you are serving compared to where you are from will deepen the experience and possibly provoke even more questions. You may find yourself hungry to learn more about the country and you should feed this fire by not only learning about the inequalities you have seen, but also about the solutions others are implementing.

In addition, having had such an important experience as volunteering far from home is a great gift. Yet, how do you share your experience with your friends and family when you return home? I have found that one of the most difficult parts of coming back is sharing my experience with people. How do you explain the feelings and emotions you experience? How do you help those around you understand the impact of what you saw and how you have been changed? One way is to share your service journal and photos. This will not only help them understand the reflection process you went through while you were abroad, but may also trigger memories for you to share. A second way to share your experience is to continue helping others at home. By taking up a cause and then inviting friends or family members to join you in service, they will better be able to understand you and the joy of helping others.

Questions for reflection

1. How will you feed the new fire inside of you?
2. Who are the people that will encourage you?
3. How will you deal with those who are not supportive of the “new” you?
4. How will you multiply this knowledge to serve even more people?

Challenge

Between two weeks and one month after you return home, meet with one of your colleagues or friends who went on the trip and talk about the experiences that you both shared.

Discuss what you learned, how you have or plan to share what you learned with others and how you plan to affect change in the future.

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Chapter 12.

Reflection 12: What next?

I would like to repeat to you something I mentioned in Chapter 5: YOU ARE A CURRENT LEADER OF THE WORLD! Perhaps you are wondering “How can I possibly take on the world’s problems? I am only one person, or I have too much work, or I am busy with family or friends.” Or maybe you think that you are not capable of creating such change because you have too many faults, you do not have time, or you do not know where to begin. Yet, great people are not born great. They often come from humble beginnings and through hard work and vision they start to create change starting small and building up. Like the business adage, “20% of the people do 80% of the work,” it is up to the 20% who have the resources to help those who may not be able to help themselves.

Nelson Mandela, one of the great leaders of the twentieth century gave his vision of the role of individuals in creating change. After spending twenty-seven years in prison for fighting against the racist apartheid system, he was released to be the first Black African president in South Africa’s history. In his presidential acceptance speech Mandela, quoting Marianne Williamson, asserted,

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Understanding what being a leader of the world means to you may take time and reflection. For some it may mean saving the butterflies in Brazil, it may be running for a political office for another, or being an amazing mother to four children to a third. None are better than any others—all are equal because all are important. However, whether you take the risk to follow your heart and be great is up to you.

Questions for reflection

1. What are you passionate about?
2. What is the next step you will take to continue serving others?
3. Knowing you are a future leader of the world, in what way do you think you can create change in this world?
4. Who can you ask to help you in this process?
5. How will you stay motivated to serve? If Mr. Mandela is correct, how do you shrink or hide your greatness? How can you let your light shine?

Challenge

Pick a problem in the world and learn about it. First, think about the historical causes of the problem. What created the problem in the first place? Now think about what keeps that problem in place today. In other words, why does this problem continue? Next, look for solutions or strategies that others have proposed and find out how and why they are working or

not working. Finally, propose your own solution. Find people who are supportive and will help you address this issue. Using your new critical mind, think about all of the questions noted above as you implement your strategies. (Who knows, you could be well on your way to winning a future Nobel Peace Prize!)

My Reflections:

[SPACE FOR JOURNALING]

Conclusion

In conclusion, you have chosen to serve in a special way. Although a week or two may seem like only a small effort, it is actually very significant to those you have helped and a major step of faith and love by you. As Mother Teresa once noted, “What we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop was not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of that missing drop. I do not agree with the big way of doing things.” In your service you have impacted people on a profound level, but most importantly, you have changed. In willing to take this difficult but worthwhile journey of service, I congratulate you!

To close where we began, “Anyone can be great because anyone can serve” is not only a statement of truth but it is a prescription for contentment in life. Love as one philosopher said, is more than a feeling, it is also a decision, a commitment, and an action. Service is the living action and concrete illustration of our love for others. I hope this book has been valuable to you as you grow as a conscientious gringo now and in future service projects.

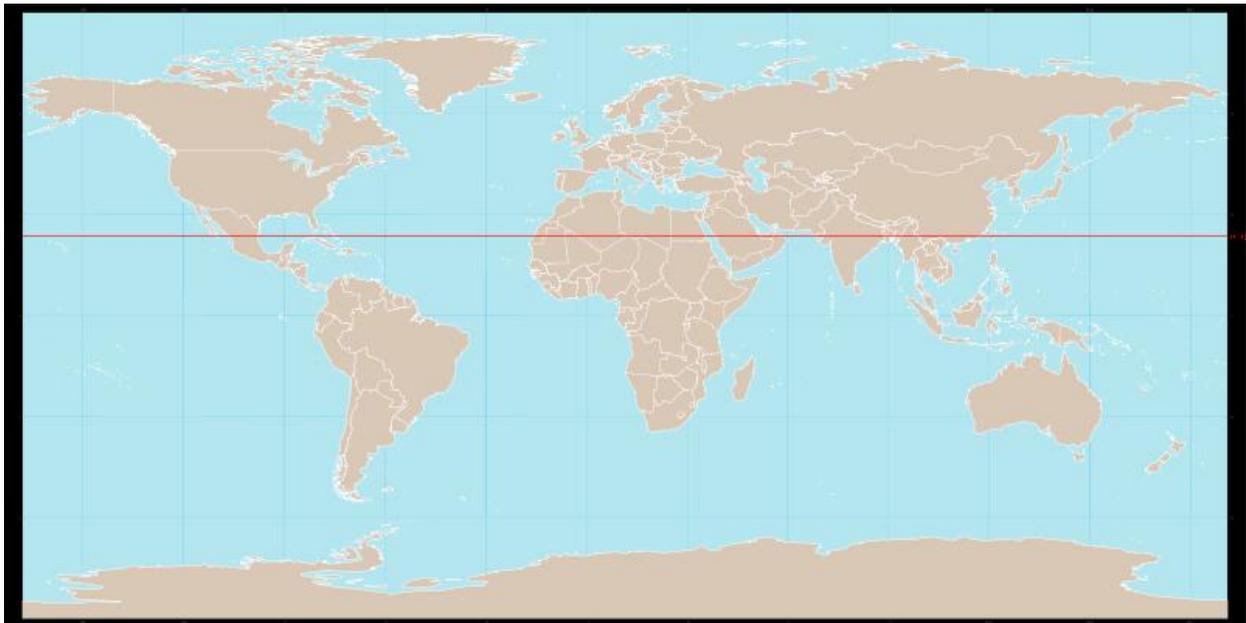
APPENDIX

Something to ponder...

- If you woke up this morning with more health than illness...you are more blessed than the million people who will not survive this week.
- If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation ...you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.
- If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death... you are more blessed than three billion people in the world.
- If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep...you are richer than 75% of this world.
- If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace ... you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy people.
- If you can read this message...you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world that cannot read at all.

World Map—Tropic of Cancer

As can be seen, almost of the countries below this line are less- or under-developed while almost all of those above the line are industrially developed. Exceptions to this claim include Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand in the south, and some of the middle-eastern, eastern-European and former Russian countries in the north. It seems prudent, then, to use this classification rather than others. For a theory on why this is, please see Jared Diamond's book, "Guns, Germs, and Steel."



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Inspirational Quotes

Please feel free to write in the open space your reflection on the meaning of the quote.

“We cannot do great things on this Earth, only small things with great love.” ~Mother Teresa

“Be the change you wish to see in the world.” ~Mohandas K. Gandhi

“If you can't feed a hundred people, then just feed one.” ~Mother Teresa

"I would rather be ashes than dust!

I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry-rot.

I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet.

The function of man is to live, not to exist.

I shall not waste my days trying to prolong them.

I shall use my time.” ~Jack London

“If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children.” ~Mohandas K. Gandhi

“I believe the great Almsgiver will charge me with theft if I do not give what I have to one who needs it more.” ~St. Francis of Assisi

“The more you know, the less you need.” ~Aboriginal saying

“It is reasonable that everyone who asks for justice should do justice.” ~Thomas Jefferson

“There are many people who talk about the poor, but there are very few who talk to the poor.”
~Mother Teresa

“Whenever you are in doubt, apply the following test: recall the face of the poorest and weakest person you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to them.” ~Mohandas K. Gandhi

“Consciously or unconsciously, every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make, not only our own happiness, but that of the world at large.” ~ Mohandas K. Gandhi

“Work is love made visible.”

~Kahlil Gibran

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

~John Wesley

“Your life and my life flow into each other as wave flows into wave, and unless there is peace and joy and freedom for you, there can be no real peace or joy or freedom for me. To see reality – not as we expect it to be but as it is – is to see that unless we live for each other and in and through each other, we do not really live very satisfactorily; that there can really be life only where there really is, in just this sense, love.” ~Frederick Buechner