

*"This is a book about not shrinking back from the challenges of the world
but leaning into them with love, resolve, and inexplicable hope..."* —BOB GOFF

A BLUEPRINT
FOR CHANGING
HOW WE CHANGE
THE WORLD

POSSIBLE

STEPHAN
BAUMAN

President of WORLD RELIEF

Praise for
Possible

“Inspiring. Hopeful. Needed. *Possible: A Blueprint for Changing How We Change the World* is a beautiful road map for us all as we discover our role in bringing God’s heart to the whole world.”

—LOUIE GIGLIO, pastor of Passion City Church and founder of the
Passion Conference

“*Possible* is a beautiful, remarkable book. Stephan Bauman gives us a blueprint for changing the world that is light on superficialities and heavy on essentials. Whether you’re a young activist discerning your path or a seasoned leader recalibrating for the road ahead, you’d do well to say a prayer and then start here.”

—JOSHUA DUBOIS, director of Values Partnerships and former
executive director of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood
Partnerships at the White House

“This is an inspiring book! Written by the leader of one of the world’s most effective relief and development organizations, it is full of stories that taught me and equipped me to be more effective in helping the way Jesus did.”

—DR. JOEL C. HUNTER, senior pastor of Northland, A Church
Distributed

“There are many resources available on how to make a difference in the world. Stephan Bauman presents the most compelling blueprint I have read on how to do that. I wish I’d had this book as a reference and guide forty years ago!”

—R. TIM ZIEMER, rear admiral, United States Navy (retired)

“Stephan Bauman is a visionary for what the people of God can do with a little faith. *Possible* doesn’t just encourage us to believe in the impossible but gives us a blueprint for action. When so much can overwhelm us with what’s wrong with the world, this book helps us act with, learn from, and come alongside those who are vulnerable. Weaving personal stories with practical application, this is an essential handbook to create a community of change makers.”

—JENNY YANG, vice president of Advocacy and Policy at World Relief and author of *Welcoming the Stranger*

“*Possible* is the book for everyone who wants to move beyond complacency to commitment and from doing little to truly changing the world. Lots of writers tell us that our world is a mess, but Stephan Bauman shows us how to fix it.”

—LEITH ANDERSON, president of the National Association of Evangelicals

“This is a book about not shrinking back from the challenges of the world but leaning into them with love, resolve, and inexplicable hope. It’s about not doing easy things but doing lasting things. Stephan Bauman has rolled out something beautiful on the table. But it’s not for us just to look at but to act upon. Part memoir, part manifesto—this book will challenge some of your assumptions and confirm others.”

—BOB GOFF, author of *Love Does*

“*Possible* is not just a blueprint for change; it’s a cartography of courage. Stephan Bauman has personally challenged me to go beyond the safety of facile and distant engagement so pervasive in our age to the arduous but promising incarnational work of world changing. If you, like me, resist the

cynicism that too often accompanies world changing, *Possible* calls you to leave the Shire with renewed hope.”

—REV. GABRIEL SALGUERO, president of the National Latino
Evangelical Coalition

“In a world of poverty, suffering, and downright evil, Stephan Bauman calls us to live lives of hope, justice, and vision. He challenges us not to passively accept what is but to courageously rouse ourselves and our communities to make a difference in the world.”

—ALEC HILL, president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

“Stephan Bauman’s new book, *Possible*, has all the marks of greatness. It avoids common pitfalls of many justice books that can either be overly optimistic or idealistic on one side or pessimistic and cynical on the other. This book is for people who still believe it is possible to change the world but want a deep and meaningful conversation on how to get there. Stephan has accomplished something special in this tight and compact treatise. It is passionately written, marked by Bauman’s years of radically hopeful living. It is intellectual and deep yet remains accessible and inspiring. *Possible* is sure to spark your imagination and fire your passions.”

—KEN WYTSMA, founder of the Justice Conference and author
of *Pursuing Justice* and *The Grand Paradox*

“The weave and texture of *Possible* catapults this book to high levels of literary beauty, yet at the same time it emotionally and intellectually intertwines our lives with the most vulnerable of the world. Stephan Bauman’s personal vulnerability connected with solid biblical, historical, psychological, and cross-cultural models make *Possible* a seminal book for our times.”

—JO ANNE LYON, general superintendent of the Wesleyan Church

“Possible invites us to take the first step toward living out God’s purpose for our lives as agents of reconciliation and restoration in the world. Wonderfully accessible, user friendly, and faithfully grounded, Bauman’s book challenges the status quo, answers the question ‘what can I do?’ and unleashes what’s possible for ordinary people to address root causes of suffering and really change the world.”

—DAVID BECKMANN, president of Bread for the World

“Stephan Bauman is a poet practitioner with the dirt of the world’s biggest challenges under his fingernails. Many books point toward the world’s problems, but few lay out reasonable solutions as Possible does.”

—JUSTIN DILLON, founder and CEO of Made in a Free World

“I love this book! In Possible, Stephan Bauman helps us understand that if we want to responsibly steward ‘our moment in history,’ we need to turn our self-focused paradigm upside down. We need to recognize the ‘enormous resilience, creativity, and unwavering hope’ of those who suffer and then thank God for the privilege of coming alongside them as co-creators of solutions and change. Stephan and his wife, Belinda, have lived out the vision of Possible. When you read their story, I know you’ll be as inspired and challenged as I have been.”

—LYNNE HYBELS, Willow Creek Community Church

“A powerful combination of gripping stories, solid theology, and probing challenge. This book does not just call us to change the world; it convinces us that we can do it. A wonderful summons to do justice.”

—RON SIDER, author of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*
and Distinguished Professor of Theology, Holistic Ministry,
and Public Policy at Eastern University

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MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

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*For Belinda, Joshua, and Caleb:
You are history in the hatching.*

With God all things are possible.

—JESUS OF NAZARETH

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how to get the most out of *Possible*

If you are bold enough to believe that change is possible, this book is for you. In the face of trials, challenges, or suffering, people often double down on hope or throw it out altogether. There are a thousand reasons to give up on our ideas or visions or dreams. Sometimes we slip into subtle skepticism, and then, without even realizing it, we find ourselves cynical. But we cannot stay there. Even a speck of faith can shake the world, moving mountains along the way. “Nothing will be impossible for you,” Jesus said.¹

The premise of the entire biblical narrative is change, significant change, initiated by God himself and carried out by people like you and me—people who are, ironically, prone to resist change. But change happens anyway.

Thank God.

Change, according to Jesus, is foremost a function of faith, not genius or genetics, circumstances, or even good strategy or resources. “Some things have to be believed to be seen,” said Madeleine L’Engle.²

Change *is* possible.

This book is more than a series of inspiring stories, practical tips, or helpful concepts. Read rightly, it should challenge your thinking, your way of life, and your actions and provide a pathway to solutions. My hope is that this book is an experience, an encounter, an event with a clear before and after.

So how can you get the most out of *Possible*? By plunging yourself into a journey—your journey—which will surprise you if you let it.

This book is full of hope because I believe that experiencing hope opens the heart, which is often a gateway to how we think and ultimately to how we make decisions. I trust the inspirational style will draw you in and cultivate a conviction that we can change the world. Fostering such a conviction requires us to imagine what is possible—to *believe*. But such faith isn't blind; I am not asking for a leap of faith. *Instead, the first order of business is to come with honest questions.* About our past disappointments, whether related to projects or programs or our time spent in the inner city or abroad. About our unfulfilled desires regarding our personal calling, our dreams, our visions, and our hopes. About our disillusionment with theology and faith. About our heartaches too. About the tensions in our cities, the plight of the refugee, and the hungry child. Change begins when we refuse to brush off our discomfort. Bold authenticity precedes action.

If you are willing to take this risk, you might find that a conversation with a friend or a group of friends will help you frame your questions, and journaling your thoughts as you work through the practical aspects of this book will bring *Possible* alive and make it yours. It will convert your ideas into practical action.

Second, pay attention to who you are. So often I am tempted to look over my shoulder at the experience of others. In my mind she is more gifted, he is more experienced, or they are more polished. Other times I work hard to ignore myself altogether—my calling, strengths, and even weaknesses—thinking that self-reflection lacks virtue and tends to narcissism. But the net result of both approaches is paralysis.

You may feel this way too. We need to understand our stories—how we are wired, where we've come from, and where we are now—so we can serve others. Ask someone you trust what he or she sees in you, or ask yourself what

passion, wisdom, or friendships drive your daily life. Then consider how your story is, or could be, part of a bigger narrative in your neighborhood, your community, or a village in another country. Think about how both your story and the story in your community are part of God's global story. Sometimes what we fear most is not really our inadequacy or failure but, rather, the greatness within us—the kind of greatness that God calls forth from those willing to reach out and take hold.

Third, think carefully about who you want to become. Tolstoy said, “Everybody thinks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing himself.”³

One of the most important questions we can ask is not *what can I do* but *who must I become*. We have the opportunity to choose to live lives of radical surrender and sacrificial love, making heroes of others, not ourselves, and honoring God along the way. This is the hard work of doing good, but it is also the most enduring and life-changing work. Don't be afraid to immerse yourself in the issue, to grapple with faith and theology, to figure out who is doing what and doing it well. Choose one issue or one focus area, and go deep. Hold on until you experience the fruit of your passion, your commitment, your labor.

When it comes to changing the world, I've never been more hopeful. But *possibility* doesn't mean *easy*. “When you have exhausted all possibilities,” said Thomas Edison, “remember this, you haven't.”⁴ Courage is on the rise, and it is embodied in unexpected and tenacious people. Technology amplifies our global voice, offering unprecedented leverage, knowledge, and platforms. Those on the front lines of suffering are increasingly engaged; some are actually leading the conversation. All this has created an environment with enormous potential for change, on par with some of the greatest movements in history. I believe we are poised for a breakthrough.

This book is a blueprint for deep change, an invitation to overhaul—

indeed, reform—our faith and deeds, to recover ancient truth, and to impact the world in new ways. It invites you to take a journey, to experience a life filled with wonder amid the challenge. I trust it will confirm your life purpose, clarify your passion, and architect your calling.

The future belongs to you. Take a risk: take up the promise of this book, and let it lead you to places that surprise you. Nothing is impossible when we lean into God with unquenchable passion and relentless faith.

—Stephan Bauman

Part I

Recovering Our Call

ONE

do we dare disturb the universe?

Do you want to do something beautiful for
God? . . . This is your chance.

—MOTHER TERESA

During an otherwise normal worship service near Washington, DC, I received a text message I couldn't ignore. A rebel militia was wreaking havoc in the Democratic Republic of Congo, one of the world's most Christian countries yet also one of its poorest and most violent, especially for women and children. My wife, Belinda, was receiving similar messages on Facebook. Gunshots and mortar fire threatened the lives of people we loved.

I sat down to exchange a flurry of texts. Belinda sat down to cry. She was thinking about her friends in Congo. Only a few months before, Belinda knelt with Esperance, a victim of sexual violence, on the dusty concrete floor of a rural church, where they laughed and cried. "You remind me I am still human," Esperance said.

When you and I hear stories about violence, war, stolen girls, boy soldiers, or hungry children, we feel helpless, exasperated, sometimes even physically ill. When we learn about senseless poverty, brutal racism, mind-boggling

violence, or preventable disease, we feel overwhelmed. We pray. Sometimes we give. But we struggle to do more.

Why?

Because we cannot change the world.

Or so we think.

A handful of years ago a friend from Indiana, Joe Johns, began to ask hard questions about conflict, faith, and peace in Congo. He and a Congolese pastor named Marcel began to help people see how local militias were turning neighbors against one another. Tensions between churches, they realized, mirrored tensions between tribes. So Marcel convened a group of fellow pastors to help them see where they were wrong. Some shed tears as they forgave one another. Others knelt and prayed together. All committed to developing a better future, making peace a priority, and mobilizing their communities to help people become peacemakers.

And mobilize they did.

Meanwhile, back home, Joe inspired his church to take on the impossible—saving Congo. His friends began to recruit their friends to help. Others gathered resources. Hundreds ran in their local half marathon to raise awareness. One group even rode bicycles across the country in a race to end Congo's suffering.

Across the country a rapper-poet and friend to Joe began to speak out on how tungsten, tin, and tantalum—all components in our cell phones and other electronics—help fuel the war in Congo, exploiting tribes and perpetuating violence against women. A few people from Bend, Oregon, also took the risk to talk about Congo, the impossible situation no one wanted to tackle. But they did anyway, their voices joining together to become a megaphone, a collective shout too loud to ignore.

A group of women from across the United States heard their appeal and traveled to Congo to meet those most affected by the conflict. Belinda joined their cause. They met ten women, including Esperance. All ten had been victims of violence and had overcome incredible odds to start businesses, provide for their children, and even forgive their perpetrators. They asked Belinda and the others to tell their stories so the world would know about “the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience.”¹ So one began to tell the world through art, another through digital portraits, and others through blogging.

And they haven’t stopped since.

When Belinda learned Esperance had escaped the warring militias, she cried tears of joy. Esperance and her sisters found strength in each other, their communities, and their new friends across the world. Now they are helping other women—their “sisters”—some as young as fifteen, to heal from rape and rebuild their lives. Some are also working to mitigate future violence.

Today thousands of peacemakers are changing Congo, and their numbers continue to swell. With their friends from across the United States, they are waging peace to save Congo one village at a time.²

A poet and a blogger, a few warrior moms, two tenacious pastors, and a crew of volunteers offered their gifts, their strengths, their vulnerability, and their grit to inspire a sea of Congolese women, heroes on the front lines of suffering, to change their forgotten corner of the world in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Can we change the world? I believe people like you will do extraordinary things when given the chance, turning some of the most entrenched, seemingly intractable situations of our day into something hopeful, something . . .

Possible.

I’ve seen it firsthand: students who took the time to help a child in Ghana learn how to overcome a life-threatening disease. A young couple who helped

a woman they'd just met to escape a war in Sierra Leone. The gutsy, over-worked doctor who helped a frightened mother deliver a baby girl only hours after an earthquake hit Haiti.

I believe “there are no *ordinary* people,”³ only people who are bold enough to think they can save a life, or some corner of the world, and fierce enough to try.

seismic shift

I am convinced the world's suffering lingers not because people aren't willing to help. Faith, compassion, and justice stir the souls of many. They are bloggers, technicians, musicians, entrepreneurs, artists, writers, nurses, electricians, rappers, moms, politicians, PhDs, lawyers, students, researchers, and doctors. They are you, and people like you—a groundswell of individuals who simply refuse to accept the world as it is. They *want* to give their lives to something more, something greater—something possible.

But we cannot change the world the way we used to. The vision of the past is insufficient to carry us into the future. While we honor those who have given their lives before us—their sacrifice, their ingenuity, and their perseverance—we are on the cusp of a seismic shift in how we bring change, moving from an era of a few extraordinary heroes to an era where tens of thousands, even millions, will effect change.

We face a crisis of vision, not will. I meet people every day who long to be part of meaningful change but experience disappointment instead. You may feel this way too. You may wonder if you can really make a difference, if you can genuinely impact the world. You understand the urgency, the gravity—real people, real lives, a billion hungry, twenty-seven million slaves⁴—and *why* we must do something. You may even understand *what* can be done.

But you may not know *how*.

Unfortunately the idea of changing the world has become rhetorical, superficial, and sometimes even cliché. What we call “change” may ring hollow or prove false. Efforts may be short-lived, paternalistic, or even harmful.

Many would-be activists succumb unwittingly to cynicism. A well-intentioned vision is oversold or gets reduced to a marketing slogan:

Overcome poverty by sponsoring a child.

Buy something “red” and eradicate AIDS.

Tweet “abolition” to end modern-day slavery.

We want to believe the world can be fixed that easily. But we know the challenges are far too complicated for easy solutions. And not only do quick solutions fall short, but they are also costly. Sometimes we do injustice to the very people we seek to help. We dabble with one issue, then shift our attention to another, or lose interest altogether, leaving our relationships shallow. We pursue versions of human progress void of local ownership, creativity, and perseverance.

We hurt ourselves too. We assume the answers—whatever they are—reside with us, because we’re slow to recognize the deep wisdom and untapped potential of those who suffer. Our theology and practice remain tethered between false dichotomies of word and deed, sacred and secular, us and them.

God forgive us.

History is inviting us to join something deeper, something more, something beyond ourselves, where we boldly stare down the facts without dumbing down the issues, where we stay the course—from *impossibility* straight through to *possibility*.

Our tipping point is near. We can seize it—or miss it for a generation

or more. With a better vision for how to change the world, you and I can reset how we engage and overcome some of the world's most desperate problems.

As outrageous as this might sound to you, this book tells how.

honest questions

Belinda and I didn't set out to change the world. In our twenties we left our rural hometown in Wisconsin for a six-month stint in West Africa, hoping to do some good while trying to find our calling. Having barely traveled, we were inexperienced and naive. Within months we were asked to lead a medical team into the bush. Villagers streamed to our makeshift clinic, some with mild infections, others with rare tumors, and one woman with a severe case of gangrene, her wound wrapped in chicken manure and banana leaves, the local remedy. Overwhelmed by the needs, the medical staff asked for our help. Belinda and I pulled guinea worms—a common, waterborne parasite—from the legs of children. I remember a boy letting a tear slip as I cleaned a wound near his eye. He was ashamed, perhaps for the pain he felt but more likely for needing help from me.

Days later I scavenged a used newspaper in Ghana's capital city of Accra. Its front page reported the World Health Organization had eradicated guinea worm from the planet.

I begged to differ.

Belinda and I had planned to volunteer in Africa for six months. We ended up staying for six years. I resigned my job in business back home, and Belinda resigned hers as a teacher. Africa became our home and justice our calling.

But Africa changed us more than we changed it. We left home with the

hope of changing the world and came back wondering if it was even possible. We had answered the *why* question without adequately considering the *what* and especially the *how*. Well-intentioned as we were, if we learned anything, we learned by doing things the wrong way first. We went to Africa with answers and left with questions—honest questions regarding faith, culture, and what seemed like superficial solutions in light of a torrent of pain: *What is God's purpose in human suffering? What is my calling in light of this purpose? How can we create lasting change—change that meaningfully empowers those who suffer most? What must I learn from those I am seeking to serve? Who must I become? What is my appropriate role, given the rise in capacity in the majority world?*⁵ Maybe you've asked similar questions.

Times have changed, and so have we. We've learned from our mistakes, the grace of friends, and the wisdom of those who suffer. There are good answers to your questions and mine, questions we'll explore together in the pages ahead.

In one of T. S. Eliot's poems, the character J. Alfred Prufrock asks, "Do I dare disturb the universe?"⁶ But he queries not with courage or resolve but with cynicism and cowardice. Prufrock has given up, resigned to finish out his days without dreams or hope. But where Prufrock whimpers, you and I can declare, "With God we dare."

I am convinced that clear vision and thoughtful action will unleash us to do more and to do it better. There is a fork in the road for all of us. Faith or fear, courage or capitulation will determine our path. One is easy, the other difficult, but only one can create the lasting change we need most. As in every age, God calls his people to do the very thing we think we cannot do. Dallas Willard spoke of a coming age of unprecedented heroism, "a time for men and women to be heroic in faith."⁷

I believe that day has come.

overhaul

What if there was a better way to change the world, a vision of such pervasive change that only the language of reformation would suffice? God invites us to change the world. Biblical? *Yes*. Possible? *Yes*. But it will require an overhaul of how we understand our calling, a radical shift in how we see the problem, and an honest look at how we think, who we are, and how we live.

We cannot remain as we are. “Vision leaves our present situation indefensible,” says Bill Hybels.⁸

Can we imagine a different future?

Envision tens of thousands, even millions, of people, whether young or old, rich or poor, super gifted or modestly talented, discovering their callings and employing their strengths to create meaningful, comprehensive, and lasting change in neighborhoods, villages, and cities.

Thus far, most of our efforts to change the world involve only a few—experts, clergy, and professionals—leaving the majority on the sidelines to serve marginally or to observe passively. Imagine instead a village or community that invites everyone, especially the most vulnerable, into the problem; that calls upon their diverse, resilient, and profound strengths; that co-creates solutions with those closest to the problem.

Imagine our global faith community, in all its expressions of worship, prayer, and study, focused first on those who are left out, those who suffer, those who are unable to experience the tangible love of God.

Much of our faith community is organized around ourselves, mainly our spiritual and social welfare. Out of our excess we devote a bit of time and

resources to the vulnerable. But what if we were to flip this paradigm on its head and instead organize around God's love for the least first, where worship doesn't sidestep the world's suffering but includes them?

Consider a group of people so thoroughly captivated by truth, compassion, and justice that their words and actions spontaneously impact others to pursue the same.

Too often we offer compassion or "do justice" merely to feel better about ourselves. We serve only if it's safe. We risk primarily for reward. Imagine, instead, a groundswell of people so thoroughly infused with the love of God that they risk their lives for others in uncommon ways.

I know people like this. Maybe you do too.

blueprint

This book proposes a set of universal principles—what I am calling blueprints—for anyone seeking to create and sustain change. Blueprints give just enough detail to help us visualize and build or arrive at something new. Think of a topographical map of a forest or mountain that shows the elevations, the likely terrains, the lakes. The geographical features are fixed, created years before, but the path you cut through the forest or over the mountains is personal and creative. Blueprints don't show everything, but they do point the way and infuse our creativity. The right blueprint can turn your life into a sacred adventure or quest, a journey that actually chooses you and changes you so completely you cannot resume your old life.¹⁰

There are three essential blueprints for us to discover:

1. The first is universal, archetypal, and invitational. It's God's divine blueprint for saving the world. It speaks to the purpose for

everything and why you are invited, by design, to join in. We'll explore several archetypal patterns of change and their implications for us today (chapters 1 and 2). And we'll grapple with, and reframe, age-old conundrums about faith and injustice (chapter 5).

2. The second is personal: how God has uniquely created, called, and designed you to participate in remaking the world. In chapter 3 we'll rethink who's called and why, dispelling some common myths. We will unpack the journey of calling, from the mountaintop experience through the valley of disappointment (chapter 4). Then we'll explore and expand the idea of creativity and our role in remaking the world (chapter 8).
3. The third is practical: what you must do to effect positive change, what the best way is to do it, and how to start. We'll explore a model for change to help you practically engage your community, church, neighborhood, or village (chapters 6 and 7). We'll also look at what it takes to multiply impact by investing in surprising agents of change (chapters 9 and 10). Finally I include two tools at the end of the book to help you practically apply these ideas to your context.

Throughout the book you will find suggestions to create your own blueprint for engaging and applying these principles to your life and the world. We will craft vision together, diagnose root issues, and map change. The ideas that follow are based on proven practices anchored in universal principles, so they will apply regardless of your context, and each will build upon the other.

If you are willing to accept this invitation, pick up a blank journal and across the first page write the word *Possible*. Unprecedented times call for exceptional people to do uncommon things. Let it begin with us.

a fellowship of dissidents

Sometimes the first step is the hardest. In the opening scene of the movie *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Sam Gamgee, a homegrown Hobbit who has never left his village, comes to the edge of the Shire to begin his unexpected journey. He says to Frodo, his Hobbit friend, “If I take one more step, it will be the farthest away from home I’ve ever been.” Frodo replies, “Come on, Sam. Remember what Bilbo used to say: ‘It’s a dangerous business going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to.’”¹¹

And so it is with us. The first step beyond the familiarity of home commits you to a journey that could falter or forever change the world and your life too. Sam Gamgee stepped into the “seeming void” and found “the rock” of faith.¹² I believe a rock is waiting there for you as well.

Years ago I took that first step, but I went kicking. I lived an ideal, almost clichéd life growing up in rural Wisconsin—*Green Acres* via rabbit ears on the family television, the Green Bay Packers on Sundays, and green bean casserole for the holidays. I played the drums in my father’s wedding band, rang the altar-boy bells at church, and fell in love with the girl next-door.

After graduating from college, I began my days in a skyscraper cubicle with the *New York Times* and a cup of caffeine. And it was there that injustice split my world in two. For months the Serbian siege of Sarajevo, the longest in modern history, captured the world’s attention. It caught mine too. I remember a 1993 headline that read: “Two lovers lie dead on the banks of Sarajevo’s Miljacka River, locked in a final embrace.” Bosko and Admira, both twenty-five, were shot by a sniper while trying to escape Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, under siege. “They were shot at the same time, but he fell instantly and she was still alive,” said a soldier who witnessed their deaths. “She crawled over and hugged him and they died like that, in each other’s arms.”¹³

In 1993 Belinda and I were also twenty-five. We were born just eight hours apart in the same small town in the same hospital and fell in love in high school, just like Bosko and Admira. For the first time I encountered war—viscerally somehow, even from the safety of my skyscraper. I could no longer dismiss someone else's injustice and suffering. Although a world away, Bosko and Admira felt up close and personal.

I vowed to do something.

At that time celebrities like Bob Geldof and Bono began talking about “stupid poverty,” about suffering that just shouldn't be, about children dying from diseases the world had long known how to cure. The world witnessed the Ethiopian famine, courtesy of CNN. Nelson Mandela was rebuilding a nation torn and oppressed by racism. On the surface I ignored these currents, but privately, in the quiet corners of my busy days, I wondered if my faith was too small.

So I said a dangerous prayer: “God, if there is more, please show me.”

Belinda suggested we volunteer in Africa, a dream she had nurtured for years, but I turned her down flat. When I finally said yes, I did so in stages. We committed to a few months at first, and then a few more, until we finally said yes for good. Belinda chose the “road less traveled”; I followed, and as Robert Frost said, it made all the difference.¹⁴

The groundswell we dream of requires more than a few people to say yes. If we can do this, you can too . . . and a couple hundred of your friends with you.

We need a generation to think big in order to inspire a fellowship of dissidents, innovators, and mavericks. When a Xhosa man was living out his twenty-seven-year prison term on Robben Island, off the coast of South Africa, he wasn't thinking about saving his country. He was doing something more difficult: forgiving his prison guard. When he walked free, he said, “I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.”¹⁵

Twenty years later he invited his former prison guard to be his honored guest at his presidential inauguration. Nelson Mandela held back “a tide of violence”¹⁶ in post-apartheid South Africa with radical forgiveness. Talk about change. Mandela said,

Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. . . . Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. *You can be that great generation.*¹⁷

Mandela’s words echo that of another dissident some two millennia earlier. Jesus, himself an unlikely candidate for bringing change, called the least likely people to change the world—many uneducated, all inexperienced, and all rough around the edges. His language to us is always “whosoever” or “if you believe” or “anyone who . . .”

Do we dare disturb the universe?

I suggest anything less than a full-throated *yes* is tantamount to turning our collective moral gaze away from what we know to be right, what we know to be biblical, and what we know to be possible.

speaking of faith

If you are new to faith, turned off for one reason or another, or merely an outsider looking in, I invite you to read on. Faith is at the heart of our conversation because the notion of saving the world demands answers to questions that are both epic and personal in scope.

A filmmaker friend who had all but thrown in the towel on faith traveled with me and a few others to Congo a few months after an upsurge in violence.

After meeting with several women who told us how they had forgiven their violent perpetrators, he made this stunning statement: “I don’t believe in the God of the United States, but I believe in the God of Congo.” My friend encountered people who spoke a profound message through their lives: “God is with us in our suffering, and that is enough. We believe.” For him it took a journey into the heart of the world’s suffering to glimpse the heart of a loving God.

I pray that you, too, discover the relentless God of the universe, not through shimmering stained glass, but instead through faces marred by suffering yet marked with unspeakable joy. No one is excluded from the quest to make a difference in the world. We need you now.

truth and dare

If you dare to disturb the status quo, then you are not afraid to seek the truth. You are probably already asking honest questions, such as these:

- Isn’t it a bit arrogant to think I can really impact the world?
- What if I just don’t have the stomach, let alone the courage, to take on suffering?
- Isn’t God the only One who can save the world?

The following questions will help you grapple with the possibility of changing the world. They are designed to help you begin your journey toward meaningful change.

You may want to discuss these questions with your friends, family, small group, college class, book club, or church. Don’t settle for pat answers, and don’t give up on your big ideas and deepest hopes. Try not to overthink the questions; just give your honest response. If certain questions don’t make sense to you, move on. They are meant merely to stimulate your thinking.

do we dare disturb the universe?

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Needs should be understood first before trying to help.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Victims can help themselves.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Faith and justice belong together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Everyone should change the world.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Simplifying the problem is important for people to engage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	It is important to be a voice for the voiceless.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	It's best to do it right the first time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Outsiders to the village, community, or neighborhood should be careful when offering help.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	We will always have poverty in this life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	God wants us to help him save the world.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		Fairly Often	Sometimes	Almost Never
11	Over the life of a project, you see an increase in leadership by the people in the community, neighborhood, or village.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	You follow a learning process for understanding what works and what doesn't.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	You see resources coming from within the community over the life of a project or partnership.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	You are surprised by the root issues of injustice or poverty.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	You see people who are often considered victims speaking up for their community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

After you've worked through these questions, consider journaling the reasons you are setting out on this journey, and list a few hopes as well. As you do, don't be afraid to dream.

Whoever you are, whatever your journey, I trust this book creates an event in your life marked by "before" and "after." I believe you will encounter God through this journey, because engaging suffering and injustice is a high calling, one that is close to the heart of God. What you do with your life matters—to you, to the world, and most of all to God.

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