

# THE ZAMBIA PROJECT

CHIP  
HUBER

FOREWORD BY  
STEVE HAAS

THE STORY  
OF TWO  
WORLDS  
FLIPPED  
UPSIDE  
DOWN

*A portion of the proceeds from this book will go to support  
Wheaton Academy's Orphan Project in Haiti and  
Cornerstone University's Night of Nets Malaria Campaign in Zambia.*



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The Zambia Project: The Story of Two Worlds Flipped Upside Down

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## CHAPTER 1

# TWO WORLDS BEGIN TURNING UPSIDE DOWN

As we got out of the van and started to walk across the dusty African landscape, hundreds and hundreds of Zambian adults and children greeted us with chanting, singing, and dancing as a community of passionate and thankful people met our eyes and ears. Our small group of American students immediately became part of the Kakolo community as they hugged and wept with the very people they had only seen in e-mail attachments and PowerPoint slides. The Maposa Basic School in Kakolo Village, the first educational structure ever built by and for these people (with resources provided by students at Wheaton Academy involved in a global fundraising project), helped in a most unusual way to strengthen the faith of a community devastated by the AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa and a community of suburban Christian high school students struggling to figure out how to live life as Christians in the midst of great blessing from their heavenly Father.

This particular life moment created an indelible memory. It became a turning point, a game changer, a defining experience that flipped upside down the lives of those who never dreamed they would be present for a moment like this one. I specifically remember Laura

Finch, one of our students, telling me that this day was one of those days she would always remember as she looked back at the whole of her life, ranking up there with her high school graduation or wedding day. And it was a day that forever changed and connected the lives of students on both sides of the world.

You couldn't pick two places in the world with less in common to the naked eye than the campus of Wheaton Academy in West Chicago, Illinois and the dirt paths of Kakolo Village, Zambia. One is filled with the finest of luxury vehicles and the other has a handful of bikes parked outside thatch-roof huts. One has immaculately landscaped grounds including a picture-perfect soccer pitch and the other has dirt that blows all over everyone and everything when the wind whips across the dry and barren ground. One is populated by teenagers dressed in the latest fashion wear and the other has children wearing the same outfit every day for a month. One has the latest technology available to almost every person walking the halls and the other does not have a computer or television in sight. Yet both of these places are communities that need something that strangely the other community can provide as God miraculously connects them together.

Over the past ten years of relationship with the needs and the people of Zambia, I've watched God do something remarkably unusual in our midst and in my own heart. Here's a little background to the story of what God has done.

**CHIP:** I can remember driving through eastern Colorado with a van full of sleeping students on a bright June morning when the thought came again to me: perhaps this next school year will be different than any of the ones I've spent working with and discipling high school students. We were on our way home from a leadership week in the mountains of Colorado and I had an initial sense that God's Spirit wanted to do something outside the norm with his group of gifted



and passionate young followers of Jesus. I was well into my second decade of ministry with students and I had thoroughly enjoyed my time and ministry with some of the most amazing teenagers in the world. I had been at a great local church youth ministry before coming to Wheaton Academy as the school's chaplain. To be honest, I'd loved my students and we'd had a lot of great experiences and opportunities in a wide variety of ministry settings. I hadn't had a "perfect" youth ministry experience, but the past decade had been nothing short of enjoyable and fulfilling.

However, there was this sense that in all the missions trips, wilderness adventures, and small group times we were still doing pretty much the expected suburban evangelical youth ministry stuff. I felt like there wasn't much of the supernatural or dynamic activity of God's astounding Holy Spirit I'd read about in the book of Acts. We gravitated toward doing things we could plan and prepare for and do reasonably well. We had spent several evenings in the mountains discussing and praying about many of these kinds of good, but "doable" ideas for the upcoming school year. And despite their validity, our final prayer time was spent daring to ask God for more, for something bigger than we could consider or dream about at this time and place. So we headed back to the urban flatlands without a tangible plan for the next year's ministry calendar, but holding onto a dream that God could change us and perhaps challenge us beyond anything we believed we could do as a team of high school students and their suburban high school teachers. Little did we know that in the year to come God would answer that prayer and do something in our hearts and our community that was way, way beyond what we could dream of under the Rocky Mountain sky. This is the story of how lives were revolutionized and transformed through a Christian high school's involvement with an initiative initially dreamed up by the Christian organizations Youth Specialties and World Vision ironically called One Life Revolution.

**LAURA FINCH, 2003 WHEATON ACADEMY GRAD: I**

wish I could say that the Zambia Project began because we finally came to our senses and realized that millions of people were dying from a preventable epidemic. But really, there is no reason any one of us would have sought out the issue of AIDS to take over our senior year of high school. This was before any of us had heard of the fabulous musical *RENT*, before (PRODUCT) *RED* had hit the shelves, before Bono had appeared in the White House garden with an AIDS agenda. Frankly, in 2002 the issue was much too far removed from us to have come up with any such idea on our own. Truly, it started with an afternoon of silence and solitude on a grassy hill overlooking a lake in Colorado.

As Chip has mentioned, we were in Colorado on a five-day hiking and camping trip designed by our friends at Noah's Ark to build team unity in the splendor of the mountains. We were an enthusiastic group, for sure. It was a lot of leaders to have all in one place, and we came from every nook and cranny of the school. The personalities and temperaments in the group were probably as diverse as you could possibly find in one group of people. On the long van drive, there had been plenty of silly moments recorded in a quote book and later, after the trip was over, we strung them all together and printed them onto one of those awful high school T-shirts that nobody wears anymore. But I do remember Chip commenting once that the inside jokes were a sign of a healthy group dynamic.

The agenda for our third day on the trail was to take it easy—hike through the morning, have lunch, and then pick a spot to spend the afternoon for an extended quiet time. It was halfway through the week and having spent the first three years of high school sitting behind a music stand, I was ready for a break. We split up and everyone found a spot to soak in Scripture and pray for a span of four hours. I had never done that, but found it luxurious, and I think the others did too. Afterwards we gathered to make dinner and discuss

our solo time. Nobody had anything too specific to say, but the general feeling at the campfire was one of restlessness. “Let’s make this year different,” someone said, and we all agreed. We headed home with that feeling but no clear answers on what it might ask us to do.

The Project LEAD year was anchored around biweekly, Thursday night book discussions/planning meetings in students’ homes. These were held usually in the basement of the home, and were always preceded by some variation on the classic salad/lasagna/brownies dinner. The Zambia Project was “born” at one of these meetings on a chilly evening in November.

**CHIP:** We were headed to one of the Project LEAD team homes for dinner when I grabbed the latest *YouthWorker Journal* issue in my mailbox at school. I saw an article written by my friend Mark Oestreicher about the AIDS pandemic in Africa, and it proposed a new project where students in youth groups were challenged to raise one million dollars in one year to specifically help respond to the immense needs of children orphaned by the disease in the AIDS-ravaged country of Zambia. I went to the website for some more specifics on the need and project, and I decided I’d bring it up at our upcoming meeting. You see, there were two things that sparked interest in my mind and heart. First, we were still praying and searching for that vision for the school year we had begun asking God for over four months ago. The AIDS crisis seemed to offer a need that was truly enormous in size and scope and significance. Second, one of the girls on our team had spent most of her life living in Zambia and had firsthand knowledge of the people and needs in that particular African nation.

When I passed out information about the project I sat and wondered what their response would be to this new idea. After all, I was quite certain there weren’t too many evangelical students or church leaders in their worlds who had talked about or promoted the need

for them to engage with or even care about the issue of AIDS and its victims. Little did I know that the church's seeming indifference to the AIDS crisis would be one of the things that made this cause most attractive to this student group. The team immediately voiced that this opportunity was different than the other ones they had looked at and discussed. We sensed that God's Spirit was calling us to be a part of the response. We couldn't resist the leading and the voice of the One who created and longed to save the children of Zambia. As you can imagine, I was thrilled with the heartfelt compassion I saw in the eyes of my students in that basement. I silently thanked God for the joy and privilege of working with and walking alongside this amazing group of friends.

**LAURA:** We had our usual discussion on a chapter by Henri Nouwen or Andy Stanley or another Christian leadership guru, and then Chip pulled out a stack of these World Vision catalogs. You know, the kind that come out right before the holidays and feature gifts to send overseas where they are really needed, as an alternative to buying more items to clutter the lives of your loved ones. This particular catalog was focused on items needed by communities suffering in the grip of the global AIDS pandemic. He suggested that we take a look and consider picking one or two items to hold a fundraiser for as a school initiative. It was a fresh and appealing idea that we couldn't remember trying before at Wheaton Academy, and we eagerly flipped through the colorful, glossy pages, pointing out the unique gifts that were available—a pair of chickens or goats, a set of warm blankets, a year of school supplies for a child. Someone pointed out that the cost of a brand-new house was only \$3,000. Someone else pointed out an item with a price tag of \$10,000. The dreaming muscle started to twitch. Surely that could be done with a few fundraisers, right? It was little more than the cost of a typical missions trip many of us had

been on. That would be a good project. It would definitely keep us busy for the year.

Looking back, this was probably one of the pivotal moments of the project, although it certainly didn't feel that way. We were already sold on the fundraiser idea. We had already set a challenging, but realistic goal. It would have been so easy to close the catalog, eat another brownie, take prayer requests, and go home. But somebody just had to flip to the back page just to see the most expensive thing available.

There it was. A three-room schoolhouse with a price tag of \$53,000. The next most expensive item was tens of thousands of dollars less. The World Vision people told us later that's exactly why it had been put in the catalog—it was the out-there, far-and-away item that they didn't expect anyone to buy, but that had to go in because our God is just that big, after all. Sitting there in the basement on that night in November, we had no idea that there was a little village called Kakolo on the other side of the globe which had been praying for a new school for two years. We didn't know that the Zambians being served by World Vision in the Zamtan Area Development Project had been hoping and praying for a new school so that their children would no longer have to walk over six kilometers each way and cross a busy highway on foot just to get an education.

In fact, there was relatively little discussion after it was first noticed. It was just settled. We were a school, and they needed a school. We wanted to initiate something different that year, and here was a ready-made project, picked from a buffet of items from a reputable nonprofit that was obviously a good and worthy goal. The dollar amount probably should have seemed more outrageous to us. The September 11 attack had just begun to take a toll on the economy, and our own school was in the middle of a multimillion dollar fundraising campaign of its own. We knew next to nothing about the AIDS pandemic, and we had no idea that our lives were about to

change. But we knew we were supposed to do something more, and there on the catalog page was the opportunity. It just made sense.

**CHIP:** How does a vision become a reality? That was the rather large and overarching question now facing us as we began to brainstorm ideas for how one goes about raising \$53,000 as a group of teenagers. The first step was to tell the rest of the student body about it through conversations with individual friends and then small groups of people like class officers, faculty members, and even the school board. We also prepared a couple of special all-school chapel presentations where we highlighted the incredible reality of the devastation AIDS has brought to the children of Africa and specifically the group of over one million orphans living in Zambia. We used videos highlighting specific families who were victims of the disease, and even used interviews and quotes from the pop music icon Bono who was in Wheaton himself championing the needs of the African continent to Midwest Americans. The students did a very thorough and attractive presentation of the need and opportunity for response, but the initial feedback of their peers and the larger community wasn't quite what they expected or hoped it would be. I would describe the initial reaction to the vision presented as uncertain and rather skeptical in nature. The numbers seemed too sterile, the videos and pictures too guilt-driven, and the AIDS cause in general remained one that American evangelicals still regarded as not worthy of their attention and resources. We had read that people like those involved with Wheaton Academy were among the most unlikely in the world to give money to people infected with HIV/AIDS virus, and we saw those statistics play themselves out in some of the early reactions to the One Life Revolution initiative. It was risky to take public such a grand vision for a somewhat "controversial" cause, but now we had put it out there and had no opportunity to take it back.

Well, as you fast forward, God did show up in our lives and in our school that year. On the morning of May 20, the last day of school for this group of senior leaders, we had a chance to celebrate in an all-school chapel all that God had done, a work that was exactly what He had promised in Ephesians 3:20, something “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”<sup>1</sup> as His power and love were at work within us in new and fresh ways. One of the senior girls had made an oversized check to World Vision and filled in the \$72,000 amount that was the representation of the very heart and character of God. We presented the check to some of our friends from the World Vision office in Chicago, and I fought back tears as I tried to sum up the past seven months and give thanks and praise to our God and those who had responded to His call. It was one of those moments as a follower of Jesus where you know that it is real, that God is alive and active. You know you have a calling and meaning and purpose in life that is undeniably profound, valuable, and consuming, and that choosing to live life investing what you have been given for the sake of others and not just yourself is indeed the best way to spend your days on this earth.

We ended chapel as a community of worshippers singing about the God who is Lord of all the nations, and I couldn’t help but dream of that day yet to come when we would be together to worship with our brothers and sisters from Zambia who will no longer be threatened by AIDS and poverty, but instead will revel in the riches and glory of God for all eternity. In many ways that chapel service could have been the final chapter of our Zambia story. But in reality, our journey was about far, far more than building a school; it was really about responding to the call of God by choosing to live our lives with eyes that see others rather than focusing on our own wants and wishes.

One day in June, I walked into my office and found a couple hundred dollars on my desk that came from a senior student’s graduation

party. The project was “finished,” but the needs of the people of Zambia continued. A year-long project became a lifetime passion and pursuit for many, and we saw up close how spiritual transformation can occur when we enter into relationship with the poor in our world. And over the next several years Wheaton Academy students raised almost three-quarters of a million dollars to help in the physical restoration and spiritual renewal of a generation of African kids.

The evangelical church has struggled deeply in responding to the AIDS crisis and the needs of the poor. In my own lifetime of following Jesus, the message of Matthew 25 where our Savior calls us to personally care for “the least of these” was seldom preached. And, in my over forty years of being immersed in Christian culture and ministry I have rarely been challenged to use my resources and influence to advocate and heal the needs of those afflicted with poverty and hunger and disease around the world. Yet now I am confident that a rather large handful of future church leaders coming out of the suburbs of Chicago will lead God’s people in a new direction, one where they will share the love and hope of Jesus to people who are at the greatest risk physically and spiritually on our planet. The Holy Spirit, for some reason only God knows, chose to descend upon this group of teenagers and anointed them to bring a new vision of gospel mission and ministry to this generation and those to come.

So that’s what this book is really all about—the stories and words of a group of students and their teachers who fell in love with the people and culture and faith of a community on the other side of the world. As you keep reading, you’ll hear more about their journey and the incredible opportunities they have had to travel to Zambia and truly build friendships with those whom God connected them to through simple prayers several years ago. You’ll also hear from the Zambian community how they got to know and came to love some rich American kids whose lives looked nothing like theirs in any way. My prayer is that after reading it you’ll believe in the anointing of



this generation of students to be restorers of God's Kingdom and that you yourself will consider joining God in pursuing the dreams He has for you to be deeply engaged in His work around the world. Enjoy the story. May it reflect God's passion for His people, both in wealthy enclaves like Wheaton, Illinois and poor African villages like Kakolo, Zambia. To Him be the glory and the blessing for bringing these two places together under the umbrella of His great love as He keeps turning lives upside down in the process.

## REFLECTION

# HOW ZAMBIA SAVED MY FAITH

Kyle Pilcher

In a way, I think my trip to Zambia saved my faith. I was so sick and tired of the fake, two-faced Christians in my community, myself not excluded. So many of us take so much for granted when, considering all we have, we should have a spirit of nonstop praise and thanksgiving to our God.

We complain about gas prices when instead we should be thankful we have a car. I can't imagine walking the eight miles I travel to school every morning if I didn't have a car. We complain when we are hungry between meals, when we really should be thankful that we eat multiple meals a day. We complain when places feel overcrowded, when we should be thankful that we don't go to school with six hundred other kids in a space smaller than my garage.

I also wonder why we are sometimes (or all the time) ashamed to be confessing believers in Jesus. The people of Zambia say "God bless you" to total strangers, wholeheartedly meaning it. I have a hard time talking about my relationship with God to even my family and friends. People in Zambia pray over loud speakers in front of strangers, and I won't even pray out loud with a friend at a restaurant just because of the way it looks to others sitting around us. If Wheaton truly was a "church community" then I should be able to walk around talking about Jesus without worrying I'll be mocked or ridiculed.

I guess what I am trying to say is that in some way my faith was faltering because of my disgust with the "Christian community" surrounding me. I became susceptible to all of the things mentioned above, and I steadily grew

further from Christ because I forgot His power and the joy I should have in just knowing Him. Seeing the Zambian people have joy in every situation was an incredible experience for me. Every meal is a blessing, every pen, pencil, and notebook is a gift straight from God, every raindrop is sent from heaven, and every plastic bag they find flying around the dirt paths to make a soccer ball is a miracle. Every one of them is so genuine and there is no façade being put up to impress us. They are the most humble people in the world. Their example to me, without them even trying, has left a deep imprint, a real scar on my life. My jealousy of their faith cannot be put into words. I will forever be in debt to them because they showed me the way a true follower of Jesus should act and think, no matter where one lives. My faith is alive again because I met Jesus in Zambia this past summer.

*Kyle is a junior finance major at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. He has been involved with United for Change's Blood:Water Mission at Belmont for the last three years.*