



## Righting Our Upside-down World

The superhero movie *The Avengers*, which unites comic-book icons Iron Man, the Hulk, Black Widow, Thor, Captain America, and Hawkeye to save the earth against nasty aliens from outer space, has racked up stellar reviews and huge audiences. I saw it with my daughter Lauren. It was just OK in my book. Of course, I am partial to Superman, if only because when the Superman movies were out people would stop me and tell me I looked like him. Then I got out of shape and people instead said I resembled Clark Kent.

Efrem Smith, superintendent of our Pacific Southwest Conference, reminded me about a Superman storyline centered around Bizarro World. On that planet, every value is turned upside down. Dishonesty, stupidity, betrayal—these anti-values were considered noble. The code of Bizarro World: “Us do opposite of all earthly things.” Sometimes it feels like we are increasingly living in Bizarro World, where values are evermore strikingly upside down from the principles of God.

Søren Kierkegaard crafted a parable in which two thieves break into a jewelry store, but instead of stealing they switch around the price tags. They put high-priced tags on cheap jewelry and low-priced tags on valuable gems. The next day they simply walk in and buy precious stones at low prices, watching others pay exorbitantly for things of little worth. His point is that the human heart overvalues things that have little importance and consistently devalues those things of enduring importance—and no one seems to notice.

Ray Johnston, pastor of Bayside Covenant Church in Granite Bay, California, recounts a story from his days as a youth pastor. So many kids had signed up for a mission trip to Mexico that there weren’t enough vehicles. Despite multiple appeals, no one stepped forward. He stood up the Sunday before they were to leave and said, “Let me see if I have this straight. We are willing to send our kids to Mexico, but not our cars.” People were struck by the absurdity. All of a sudden, there were vehicles to spare.

Here are three emerging initiatives to help us join Jesus in reversing this upside-down Bizarro World.

1) *72*. This set of insightful and implementable resources helps Covenanters engage in relational evangelism. The name is from Luke 10, where Jesus sends out the 72. None of the 72 is named, reminding us that the work of the kingdom is centered on those who simply walk faithfully, not for acclaim, but for wanting to be

difference-makers. 72 centers in the simple practices of prayer, acts of service, and watching for the doors of divine opportunity to share the hope of life in Christ.

2) *Covenant Kids Congo, Powered by World Vision*. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, where we have served for seventy-five years, has been through such horrific civil strife this past decade that it is now rated the neediest country in the world by the United Nations Human Development Index. With relative peace returning, this is the time to push forward decisively. Many families are forced to choose who among them will share in one meager meal a day. Children are dying needlessly from preventable childhood diseases. It is a deeply compelling need. We are entering an unprecedented partnership with World Vision to stand alongside the Congo Covenant Church to address community-identified projects around clean water, health, nutrition, education, and micro-enterprise. Make sure your church hosts a Hope Sunday this fall, where households can enter into a child sponsorship that will benefit not only that child but their family and community as well.

3) *Matthew-Micah Initiative*. This endeavor through the Department of Compassion, Mercy, and Justice (CMJ) will use the causes named by Jesus in Matthew 25 (I was hungry and you fed me; thirsty and you gave me drink; a stranger and you invited me in; naked and you clothed me; sick and you looked after me; in prison and you visited me) as a biblical agenda and combine it with the call in Micah 6:8 to love mercy, do justly, and walk humbly with our God. Debbie Blue, head of CMJ, has identified the prison phrase as the beginning point. What might it look like if every congregation took part in the continuum of prevention, visitation, and re-entry, while also finding ways to support both families of prisoners and those who serve in the criminal justice system?

The lost. The neediest place on earth right now. Perhaps the most disregarded segment of our own population. The Covenant never takes the easy way. We will do what it takes to follow Jesus in turning this upside-down Bizarro World right-side up. Why? Because the price tag Jesus has placed on each person is the price of his own life. ■

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