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A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter

I will never forget the worst case of culture shock I ever had. In fact the shock was so deep and so pervasive that for the first time in my life I experienced a feeling of incredible despair. Despair is the absence of hope. And to lose hope, even for a fleeting moment is the most fearful state of the human spirit which I can imagine. I lost hope for about twelve hours in December of 1988.

I had landed in Bombay, India on my way to Hyderabad a large city in central India. I was wholly unprepared for what greeted me. I had been warned about the conditions of Indian cities and I thought I was ready, but I wasn't.

Driving from the airport to downtown Bombay simply overwhelmed me. I have never seen anything like the miles and miles and *miles* of people living in cardboard hovels as we made the drive. Then to arrive in the city proper to see masses of folks who were born, lived, and died on the streets. "How can we succeed in lifting the burdens from those standing in such stark need?" "How can we possibly transform the conditions of so many so that they have a chance to live a genuinely human existence?"

I remembered the sailor's prayer, "O Lord, the ocean is so great and my boat is so small!" And for the first time in my life, I felt that we could not win against the immensity of such deterioration. I had the conviction that we simply were doomed by an eventual engulfing sea of human dysfunction. I thought I was seeing the apocalypse of America and the world revealed in preview outside of Bombay. I lost hope.

I had never felt that feeling before. It is awful. St. Frances de Sales accurately described my state as "the *dark night* of the soul." Someone once observed, that the human being can live 50 days without food, a week without water, five minutes without air, *but not one second without hope*. I know that that is an exaggeration, but it points to the crucial role which hope plays in our entire outlook of life.

I felt like we were destined to lose our quest to rise to a higher way. And a whole flood of darkness began to rush into the recesses of my spirit. Most of us quote the poet, "hope springs eternal in the human breast." But few of us were told the rest of that line written by Alexander Pope, a pocket cynic himself, "Hope springs eternal in the human breast:" he wrote in *Essay on Man*, "**Man never is**, but always to be blest."

I felt utterly helpless, and totally hopeless. I remembered Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*,

*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Awaits alike the inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

There was no hope to fix this world. For the first time I experienced a smidgen of what my brothers and sisters feel who have no way out of the pit of poverty. The tragedy of wasted minds and beautiful souls allowed to lie fallow and wither is their lot

everyday. I also experienced the feeling of hopelessness which many of the well off have here in America when we look at the massive disintegration process going on in our own cities. And it was important that I feel the feeling of hopelessness on both sides of the aisle.

I could always *see* why the *haves-nots* would despair. I had just never *felt* the emotion, however fleeting. But frankly, I had had little patience with the despair of the *haves*. Why should we lose hope and become cynical? We have everything except joy. And we have every reason to be joyful except the irritating and persistent presence of fellow human beings who suffer around us. (Maybe that is why we get so angry at the poor. They disturb us somewhere in consciences that we thought were safely asleep.) Now here I was feeling despair and compared to the masses of Bombay, *I* was fabulously, unimaginably wealthy. Why should I feel despair. But I did.

Then something happened inside of me. Long remembered truths begin to reemerge in my soul.

One truth was this: *the vital will always win over the massive*. A tender blade of grass, because it is alive, can eventually split a concrete sidewalk. A spring of water, because it is dynamic, can wear away a boulder. And a passion strongly held by a person, can bring down the mightiest potentate.

I remembered that the lessons of history teach us that the *vital will always* win over the massive.

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a seed growing secretly. It will have its day. He talked of the tiniest seed, the mustard seed, which produced a great bush. Look for the growing seed if you want to have hope. Look for the person who embodies an idea or an ideal until it is wedded with their spirit and nothing can defeat it or kill it - there you have the vital and when you see that then you will have hope.

I remembered that the old teacher said, "Any fool can count the number of seeds in an apple. *But no one can count the number of apple in a seed!*" I saw massive problems in Bombay, India. Massive.

But I remembered vital people. People who embodied the truth of a seed.

I remembered that whole civilizations have been changed by a single individuals who are willing to be planted in the soil of great notions and to allow those ideals to become a part of their entire beings until they walk through the streets of the city bringing hope which is both infectious and compelling. I am glad that I remembered! It put my feet back under me and prepared me for Shreveport Community Renewal.

On my desk is a 1943 *National Geographic Magazine*. There is an ad in the front section showing an old fashioned kitchen sink with a board clamped onto it. On the board is a strange contraption with a pipe and a wire, and a cup and a flywheel all somehow connected. Looking at it with our worldly eyes it just doesn't look like much. But in the eyes of hope it is different! The ad reads, "***In the Ford kitchen...this little trial engine sputtered into life.***"

I look at the rudimentary model of SCR in the neighborhoods and across the city in just the same way. SCR has sputtered into life and I have hope!! Come and join our Mission Team today!