

Love Goes Beyond Statistics

How can I possibly make a difference?

- 795 million people do not have enough food to eat.
- Over 600,000 Americans will die of cancer this year.
- It is estimated that as many as five million senior adults are abused and/or neglected each year in the US.
- Over 15 million children worldwide are orphans.

I could go on and on, noting statistics on homelessness,



those who can't work because of chronic illness, abortion, and other issues that threaten life, but you get the point: our world is so overrun

with need—*great* need—that we feel overwhelmed and unable to make a difference. Where do you even begin?

These statistics are powerful, but they don't carry the same weight as suffering close to home. It's sad that 600,000 Americans will lose the battle with cancer, but it's quite another thing when it's our own child fighting cancer.

In 1947, The Washington Posts attributed this quote to Joseph Stalin:

"If only one man dies of hunger, that is a tragedy. If millions die, that's only statistics."

Stalin uncaringly blew off the death of millions, but this quote captures a truth about our nature: we see the individual, not the masses. It's not that the masses are unimportant, but we're drawn to the individual.

Nowhere in the Gospels do we see Jesus healing the masses. He healed on an individual basis. He healed person by person because the individual mattered to Him.

Peter Singer would disagree. This controversial moral philosopher bristles at the amount of money used to ease the suffering of one person. He notes that it costs \$40,000 to train both a seeing-eye dog and the individual who receives that dog. Yet he says that same money could be better spent curing 80,000 people of the eye disease trachoma.

From a purely secular and statistical view, Singer's argument makes sense. *Do what will help the most people.* He carries this further by railing against the cost of expensive medical treatments for one person, rescuing "defective" babies, and providing long-term care for the extreme elderly. (It should be noted that Singer uses his money to support an individual: his aged mother suffering from dementia.)

Jesus did not follow Singer's advice. During his earthly ministry, Jesus did not heal everybody. (Side note: Healing was not Jesus' primary purpose. His mission was to deal with people's greater need: deliverance from sin.) Those Jesus did heal He healed through a personal touch. He interacted with them. He saw the individual.

Love does not focus on statistics; love focuses on the individual.

We can let the immensity of the statistics before us paralyze our actions ... or we can step in and help the individual right in front of us.

There's an old sermon illustration about a guy walking along the beach and periodically picking something up and throwing it into the water. A curious observer saw he was holding a starfish, and he asked the man what he was doing.

"If a starfish stays out of water for a length of time," the man said, "it will die. So I'm rescuing them by throwing them back into the water."



The bystander pointed down the long beach and cynically laughed, "Do you really expect to make a difference to all these starfish?"

The man looked at the starfish he was holding and threw it into the water. "It made a difference to that one."

Don't focus on the statistics; focus on the person suffering right in front of you. Make a difference to that person.