



A hundred dollars and a hope

Teaching my children how to change the world

The idea of teaching my children about charity always seemed pretty straightforward. But all of that changed on a trip with my two young sons, when a homeless man asked us for money.

Clearly the man had a need that touched our hearts. But then the issue became more nuanced: What could we do? What *should* we do? In a way, the moment encapsulated my long path toward social engagement.

That path started when I accompanied my stepfather on a trip to help rebuild a family's home that had been destroyed by fire. My stepfather had driven 50 kids from New Jersey to Maine, to partner with Mission at the Eastward, a ministry of Presbyterian congregations in west central Maine. All I had to do was spend a few days on scaffolding with a paintbrush to play my small part in restoring the family's lives. I remember watching my stepfather hand the house keys to the relieved father and his three children. That shaped my vision of being God's hand for good in the world.

Fast-forward 30 years. As I pull into St. Louis with my two young boys, we are solicited for change by the homeless man. My youngest, seven years old at the time, begs me to give him money. But I decline. OK. Terrible dad, right? I went on to explain that I believe in developing organizations' capacity to address the needs of the homeless over the long term. Sure, that money would directly help that man today, but maybe by giving it to the local Salvation Army we could help people like him escape poverty altogether. You can guess how that played, right? For the rest of the trip, I was the mean man driving the car.

On returning home, I was faced with a challenge. How could I help my son see that he could make a difference, in the way my stepfather had shown me? First, I tried encouraging my kids to take vegetables from our home garden to our church's food pantry. Although the gesture involved tangible benefit, it still did not help the kids see the impact of their giving.

So we launched another experiment, one inspired by musician David LaMotte's "Changing the World" session at the Wild Goose Festival, a faith-and-culture mishmash of art, live music, activism, and camping. We change the world, LaMotte says, by identifying a need (one that breaks your heart), community resources, and one thing you can do to help.

In our latest venture, my youngest (now 12) and his brothers have been asked to take more responsibility. I'm calling the experiment "A Hundred Dollars and a Hope." Each boy received \$100 to give back to the community. The kicker was that they had to research charities, choose a charity, develop a PowerPoint presentation explaining their choice, call their charity before donating, and find time to visit their charity to learn what they do. Ideally, they would also volunteer. All three boys chose local animal shelters, and we are lining up our visits.

The experiment has energized my sons in a way that I hope will be lasting. Yes, it was "my" money, but I'm hoping their research and service will connect them to giving in a way that doing the work for them would not.

If the idea proves successful with my boys, I will be sharing it later this year at a men's retreat I'm leading. My hope is to spark lasting outreach among a larger group.

Our world will always need us to reach out and help others. Teaching the next generation will go a long way toward that end.



Brian Frick's three sons explore the outdoors.