

Books and resources

Everything Must Change, by Brian D. McLaren

Thomas Nelson (2007).

ISBN-13:9780849901836, 256 pp.

In the first five pages of *Everything Must Change*, Brian McLaren makes the claim that there are four deep dysfunctions that are determining the shape of the current world. The prosperity crisis, equity crisis, security crisis and spirituality crisis are at the core of all of the global crises that grip our planet at this historical juncture.

With the patience of someone who truly wants to engage believers and not browbeat enemies, *Everything Must Change* is a fabulous manual for those who wonder what they – as believers in Christ – can possibly do about genocide, climate control, famine or any other of the topics that dance across the front pages of newspapers, but are rarely addressed from pulpits.

Like all of his books, McLaren writes for those persons who do not agree with him or do not see the world as he does. He writes as the pastor and teacher that he is, and one can imagine him wanting to sit across the table from the reader and engage him or her in passionate discussion about these complex issues. These are the kinds of problems that require unpacking, gentleness and finesse, and McLaren brings all that to this book.

Everything Must Change contains nothing surprising for those who are followers and fans of McLaren, but it is well worth the read anyway. Allow him to teach you how to wrestle with the complex issues that face humanity through the lens of the Kingdom. You will not be disappointed.

Reviewed by Kristin Nielsen,



Mountains Beyond Mountains, by Tracy Kidder

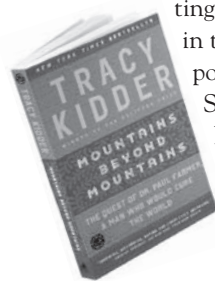
Random House Inc. (2004).

ISBN-13:9780812973013, 352 pp.

When I picked up Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, I was unsure of what to expect. The back cover told me that it was the story of Dr. Paul Farmer, his organization Partners in Health, and his quest to heal the world. While it is certainly that, it is also a beautifully woven call to worship and service for those who live in the developed world.

The book is both convicting and inspiring, and I have yet to meet a person who was not changed by reading it.

Farmer is a Harvard-educated physician who spent his medical school years flying back and forth between Cambridge and Haiti, setting up a world-class free clinic in the Central Plateau of that poverty-ravaged country.



Since those years, Farmer has been active in restoring health to persons in nearly a dozen countries and has recruited thousands of doctors and laypersons to the cause.

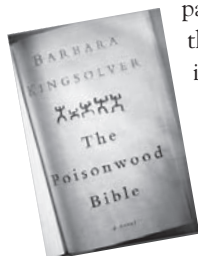
Though Farmer himself does not publicly claim a faith system, he has built his life upon his understandings of the teachings of Christ. Using a Latin American theologian as his guide, Farmer lives his life with a “preferential option for the poor” that he believes all of humanity should have. For persons who are wondering what it could mean to serve “the least of these,” *Mountains Beyond Mountains* contains the story and soul of a man who has spent his life doing just that.

— Kristen Nielsen

The Poisonwood Bible, by Barbara Kingsolver

HarperCollins Publishers (1998).

ISBN-13:9780060175405, 560 pp.



Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* is many things; a sobering exploration of missionary families; a cautionary tale of cultural colonialism; and an overture of love to the people of Africa,

particularly the Congolese. At the heart of the book, however, is the story of a family that finds they cannot cling to what was when they are now faced with what is.

Set against the backdrop of the Congo in the early 1960s, the female members of the Price family serve as the narrators throughout this novel that tells the story of their move from Georgia to serve as Baptist missionaries in this large sub-Saharan African nation. The fire-and-brimstone preaching patriarch, Nathan, throws himself into the task of converting those around him, leaving his wife and four daughters to their own devices. Each woman reacts to her surroundings in unique ways and each is marked by Nathan's mission and the village's reaction to it. As both Nathan's mission and the country itself begin to unravel, the women are forced to find their own paths toward righteousness.

As one character remarks in the closing chapters, "We all write our own versions of our cultural scriptures – we each write our own poisonwood Bibles." The question that is therefore posed to us, as participants in the Kingdom, is how do we present the life-altering gospel of Christ in ways that are culturally sensitive for the receivers and not dependent on the culture of the givers?

Although one hopes that true-life stories like the one fictionalized in *Poisonwood Bible* are rare, history suggests otherwise. The history of the Kingdom on earth is littered with well-intentioned persons who actually did more harm to their surroundings than good. By holding a mirror up to such practices, *Poisonwood Bible* can serve as a cautionary tale to those who believe that their presentation of truth is the only valid one. The gospel of Christ deserves to be heard without conditions or baggage. *Poisonwood Bible's* explorations of these themes, and many others, deserve our attention as we seek faithfully to love our neighbors abroad. — Kristen Nielsen

There is No Me Without You, by Melissa Fay Greene

St. Martin's Press (2006).

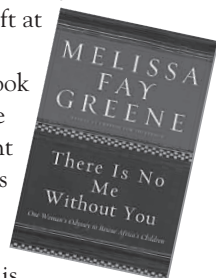
ISBN-13:9781596911161, 480 pp.

"A book that reads like the AIDS pandemic itself." — Book list Review

Melissa Fay Greene is an adoptive mother to two Ethiopian children. She writes succinctly and compellingly about the progression of AIDS in Ethiopia using Heregewoin Teferra's life and story to illustrate the power of personal and individual intervention by faithful and fearless Africans.

Teferra, who lost her children to AIDS, began taking in orphaned and abandoned children well before HIV and AIDS were well understood. She effectively transformed herself from a nice, clean, safe neighbor lady into an outcast in her own society in order to save the lives of children left at her doorstep.

Greene takes a close look at a topic that appears to be at the fringe of an important social event and illuminates the entire subject while keeping the urgency of the greater crisis before us in this moving, impassioned narrative.



The middle-aged heroine, Teferra, is "just an average person with a little more heart." The vignettes of loss, secrecy, panic, stigma and, sometimes, hope demonstrate the complexity surrounding issues of biological family bonds, international adoption, stigma, orphanage care, multinational drug companies, and poverty. Greene is talented at weaving together these stories with a clear description of the science of epidemiology and transmission for the average reader.

Heregewoin Teferra passed away recently. This story is her legacy and essential reading for anyone interested in working with children and their communities in sub-Saharan Africa.