

Building Blocks Not Stumbling Blocks

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at FBC, September 29th, 2024, Mark 9:38-50, using information found on Baptist World Aid Australia website)

The disciples stumble across someone they don't know, who seems to be doing good on Jesus' behalf, but they don't know him, he is not part of the 'in group'. They try to stop him, to put a roadblock in his way and then come back to Jesus and tell him about it. I guess they expected Jesus to be pleased with what they had done and how they had reacted to this man. Alas, Jesus is not impressed, he tells them not to stop such people, because, those who are not opposing what Jesus does are actually allies. He continues by warning them about not being roadblocks or stumbling blocks to others, and these warnings are pretty severe. Nor should we be stumbling blocks to ourselves.

I am sure we have all encountered stumbling blocks on our journey. We want to do good but something or someone stops us. Perhaps others ridicule what we want to do, suggest it won't really make a difference, tell us we are not capable of doing it. Perhaps we put our own stumbling block there – maybe we are fearful or anxious or not confident we can do whatever it is we are called to do.

Why do people put stumbling blocks in our way? Anger, revenge, judgement, prejudice, their own ambition, their need to be right, not really listening or feeling superior. Perhaps pride, fear, busyness or a desire for power and control is what gets in the way.

These stumbling blocks also occur in a global sense and for the same kinds of reasons. Many in our world live in poverty, live in the midst of conflict or are oppressed by others. For many, external situations stop them from living life to the full.

Jesus wants us to turn those stumbling blocks into building blocks. Instead of blocking to encourage, support others in being all they can be. Instead of competing we need to understand ourselves to be on the same team, the team that wants everyone to reach their full potential.

This is in part, what organisations like Baptist World Aid do. Fifty years ago, in India the first CEO of Baptist world Aid came across some children who had been orphaned and were being cared for by families of the local Baptist church. Soon Baptist World Aid began housing and educating these children and in 1974 the Support an Orphan program began. Since then, thousands of children have received shelter, food and education that has changed their lives.¹ Building blocks not stumbling blocks.

Baptist World Aid works with partner groups in countries around the world,² people working together and not being stumbling blocks to each other.

In Nepal, very few children in Netuwa went to school, meaning many would live in poverty for most of their lives. After workers spent time with the children's parents and sharing

¹ Taken from 'Strength to Strength – celebrating 50 years of Child Sponsorship' article found on Baptist World Aid Australia website.

² Taken from 'God is at Work' article found on Baptist World Aid Australia website.

with them about the benefits of education the situation changed, now 85% are sending both their sons and daughters to school regularly. Building blocks not stumbling blocks.

In Uganda, many families struggle to keep their children at school. One of BWA's partners set up a bakery club with 30 children involved and in just a few months they were selling bread at the local market, making money which is shared amongst the participants, and used to buy more supplies for more baking – a local enterprise providing income for many.

In Malawi, members of the community have been encouraged to take ownership of programs – young people manage the tree nurseries, others are promoting good hygiene and sanitation practices in the marketplaces and others have built classrooms for the local school. Building blocks not stumbling blocks.

In Ukraine, BWA's partners and local churches join together to cook meals in mobile kitchens to feed more than 1500 vulnerable people. Building blocks not stumbling blocks,

I invite Marlene now to give us an update about Romanjur who lives in Bangladesh.

Child sponsorship has moved away from individual child sponsorship to helping communities care for their children and in so doing, they are supporting parents and siblings, empowering entire communities.

The work of Baptist World Aid supports entire communities – so children can access education , so they can be encouraged to speak up for their own rights and that of others, so parents can be helped provide for their families and they also support people affected by natural disasters to find safety and shelter. Building blocks not stumbling blocks.

Let's be part of building up those communities, partnering with Jesus to bring wholeness to all.