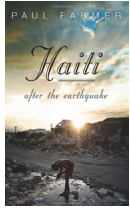


Opportunities to Affect: In Reading Groups

By: Diana Bridges

Haiti After the Earthquake

Paul Farmer



For Group Reflection and Discussion

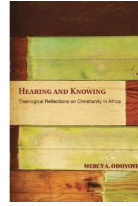
In *Haiti After the Earthquake*, Paul Farmer, a medical doctor whose roots in Haiti run deep, provides a look at the immediate impact of the earthquake through the eyes of one of the world's foremost humanitarians.

1. Do you remember what you were doing on January 12, 2010? When did you learn of the earthquake that struck Haiti? How did the news affect you?
2. Before reading this book, did you know very much about Haiti, a country less than 700 miles from the U.S.? What is the most surprising fact you learned from your reading?
3. The book begins with a photo of Neg Mawon, a statue that symbolizes the story of the Haitian people and gives them hope. What statues, monuments, or works of art give you hope?
4. "Suffering is never just pure suffering; it occurs in a particular place and time." Why is the context of suffering important? How does the context of Haiti's suffering show a possible path forward?
5. The author struggles with his calling as a doctor to help those who are in front of him versus the need to look at the big picture to keep such devastation from happening again. How does he make peace with both of these inclinations? Do you tend to have a micro or macro approach to solving problems? What about your faith community?
6. "Poverty and inequality are the drivers of most of the diseases and misfortunes we see." Do you agree with this statement? What factors other than the earthquake itself contributed to the disaster in Haiti? Can you name other places in the world where natural disasters were made worse by human factors?
7. "In the years before it [the earthquake], we saw that Haiti had become a veritable 'Republic of NGOs,' home to a proliferation of goodwill that did little or nothing to strengthen the public sector." How can people committed to bringing about good in others' lives so completely miss the mark?
8. In discussions with President Clinton, the possibility is raised of using Rwanda as a role model for recovery. How did the leadership of Rwanda help the country move toward stability and economic growth?
9. The author discusses the tragedy of people dying from minor injuries and from infections that could be cured with antibiotics or prevented by inexpensive vaccinations. Why were the needed medications in such short supply?
10. Why was it so difficult to get patients transferred to hospitals in the Dominican Republic, the U.S., and elsewhere?
11. Weeks after the quake, Farmer returns home to the city of Cange and reports his visit to a church: "The pews were gone, and from lintel to altar lay row upon row of mattresses. Above the altar, a black Christ (a beautiful batik from Uganda) presided over a scene of expert mercy." How do you react to this scene?
12. In Farmer's brief history of Haiti, he mentions nations, individuals, and events that have shaped the country. Which negative factors stand out? What positive factors are mentioned?
13. What barriers kept 400,000 people without adequate shelter more than a month after the quake?
14. Activist Michele Montas compiled interviews about the future of the country from poor people all over Haiti in a project called "Voices of the Voiceless." What were some of the suggestions generated? (See her account in the "Other Voices" section of the book.)

15. How did a cholera epidemic begin in Haiti when many experts said it would never happen?
16. What is the difference between a “maximalist” and a “minimalist” in the public health debate? What leads to such polarization? How can it be overcome?
17. In his epilogue, Farmer reflects on the successes and failures of the year following the quake. What are his most important insights? How are they applicable to local church ministries?
18. After all the discussion of problems with NGOs and humanitarian aid, which organizations would you feel comfortable supporting after a natural disaster?
19. What do you know about CBF’s work in Haiti? How is it connected to some of the overarching goals Farmer discusses?
20. How can churches contribute to scenes of “expert mercy”?

Diana Bridges is one of CBF’s field personnel. She ministers among refugees in San Antonio, Texas.

next month:



In *Hearing and Knowing: Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, Ghanaian theologian Mercy Oduyoye gives an in-depth look at the church and theology in Africa. She encourages African churches to work toward an inclusive vision where both men and women lead and serve in the church and in the world.