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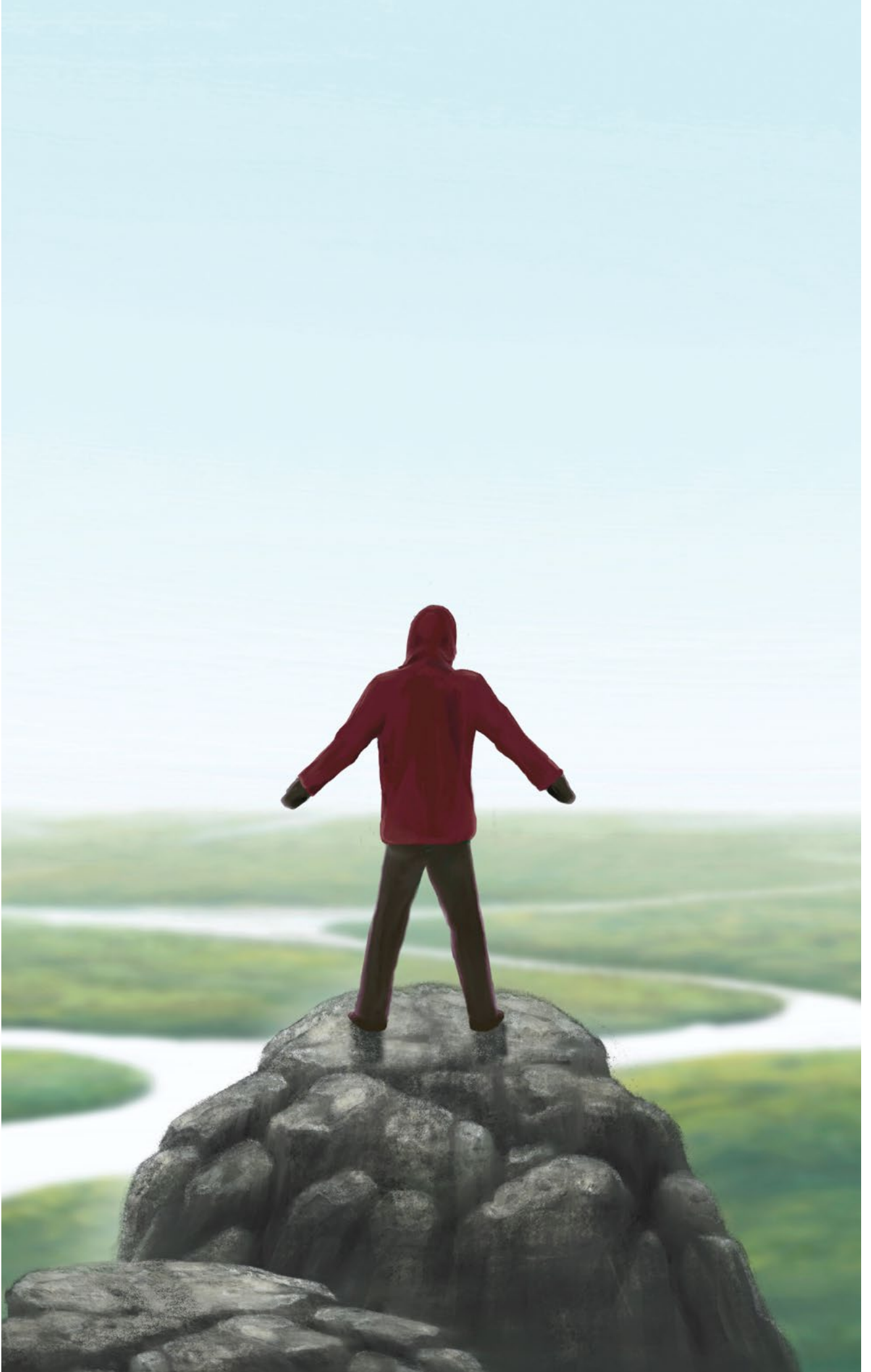
CHAMPION

Standing up for people in need



Public Perception | The Good Samaritan

Proactive Stewardship



Who Is My Neighbor



Pointing the world to Jesus
in divisive times

by Dennis Van Kampen

DENVER RESCUE MISSION

*How do we
pursue justice, healing,
and reconciliation during
such a time as this? How do we
point like arrows to Jesus?*

Have you ever witnessed a moment, a choice ... a life that changed yours?

The late Christian music artist Rich Mullins, author of the worship song “Awesome God,” once did a photo shoot on a mountain. As the story goes, the photographer had Mullins hike to the top while he stayed below. Looking upward, he told Rich to spread his arms. Mullins spread them wide open to 90-degree angles and asked, “Like this, like Jesus [on the Cross]?”

The photographer called back, “No just a little lower.” Rich lowered his arms. The photographer shouted, “You look like an arrow pointing to heaven!” That moment and the resulting photograph became so iconic that several years after Mullins’s tragic death in 1997, author James Bryan Smith wrote a devotional biography titled *Rich Mullins: An Arrow Pointing to Heaven*.

That story — and that image — remind me of John the Baptist. He was the forerunner to Christ ... a powerful prophet and preacher who used his words, actions, and life to prepare the way for the Messiah. As followers of Jesus, we have the same calling today: to be living “arrows” that point others to Jesus.

The scandal of grace

We live in polarizing times. Families are being torn apart. Friendships are disintegrating. Churches are splitting ... and our missions are not immune. What are we to do in this moment? How do we pursue justice, healing, and reconciliation during such a time as this? How do we point like arrows to Jesus?

When I began my rescue mission ministry career 14 years ago, I attended a regional Citygate Network (Association of Gospel Rescue Missions) conference. In the first breakout session, the presenter was a board member of a local rescue mission. He talked about the need for us to be a part of the CoC (Continuum of Care program). He ►



said, "Remember that in these meetings and in so many others, you may be the only representation of Jesus that others in the meeting ever see."

That statement struck a chord deep in my spirit. It stuck with me. It helped form my ministry. And it gives rise to several potentially transformative questions: How do we show up? How do we engage, particularly with those we disagree with? Do we show up ready for a fight, ready to prove our point of view, ready to meet fire with fire? Or is another way possible? Can we see the other person or group as our neighbor?

Most Sunday school classes for kids teach the story of the Good Samaritan. Sometimes I wonder if we as adults have relegated this story to children and thus missed or forgotten how radical this story of justice and healing

really is. This is not a feel-good kids' story; on the contrary, it is a story that is designed to make us feel very uncomfortable. It asks serious questions of each of us.

You may recall the Luke 10 story: A man was walking to Jericho. He was robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the road. Three men came upon the injured man as they traveled that road. The first was a priest. When he saw the man, he crossed over to the other side. At first glance it may seem like this was cold. However, the priest was following the religious Levitical law: Whoever touches a dead human body will be unclean (Numbers 19:11-13). The second person to walk by was a Levite. The Levites were descendants of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. They, too, held special roles in religious and priestly duties. The Levite also passed by on the other side of the road.



"... you may be the only representation of Jesus that others in the meeting ever see."

Then, the plot twist: A Samaritan came along and saw the man. He stopped. He dressed the man's wounds and took him to a safe place to recover, even covering the costs of his recovery. This was scandalous. The Samaritans and Jews hated each other. They were bitter enemies. You would have expected the priest or Levite to stop and care for one of their own, but they did not. Their religious views got in the way.

Jesus commands us to be a neighbor to others ... to show mercy the way the Samaritan did. This is the scandal of the story: that our neighbor includes those who do not look like us, vote like us, think like us, love like us, or pray like us ... plus everyone else.

Who is your neighbor?

Speaking the truth in love

Shortly after I moved to Denver to join Denver Rescue Mission, I attended a large DRM event. During that event a major donor walked up to me and introduced himself. Following the pleasantries he asked, "Are you

feeding those migrants?" He proceeded to let me know that we should not help anyone except those from our country. We should not let beds be taken away from "our people." I listened. When it was time to speak, I informed him that for more than 130 years DRM had always served all who came to us.

He responded with some political talking points. I listened. When it was time to speak again, I simply shared that our decision to serve anyone has nothing to do with politics and everything to do with Jesus. We have staff and donors of all political parties and viewpoints. What unites us is our faith and our calling. I shared that in Matthew, Jesus says feed those who are hungry, give clothes to those in need, welcome in the stranger, care for the sick. In a mysterious way, when we do this, we are doing this for Him. And when we refuse, we are refusing to do this for Him. I let the donor know that if our boss (Jesus) changed His program, we would change ours — but not until then.

He walked away. I thought I had lost a major donor at my first event! But a couple of weeks later he emailed his donor relations officer to share that he was impacted by the conversation, had changed some of his opinions, and would continue supporting our work.

When I think about how to show up in our current culture and how to navigate issues of restoration and justice, I believe it's critical to follow scriptural principles. For example, in Ephesians 4, Paul writes that we are to "speak the truth in love." There are three parts to this: ▶



Photograph by Scott Strebble, courtesy of Denver Rescue Mission


Do we, like the Samaritan, care for those who are different from us and those with whom we may disagree?

We must speak; we must speak truth; and we must always do so in love.

It's so easy to apply this principle selectively. We speak and are proud that we are speaking the truth, but do we do so in love? Do we, like the Samaritan, care for those who are different from us and those with whom we may disagree? James calls us to "be quick to listen, slow to speak" (James 1:19). Do we take the time to be quiet, ask questions, and truly listen to the answers?

I believe the pathway to healing, reconciliation, and justice involves showing up, getting off our horse, and caring for the least among us ... to listen, and when the time is right, to speak the truth in love. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that if we "speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love" (1 Corinthians 13:1), we will be viewed as clanging cymbals. No one will hear us.

The Good Samaritan took a great risk. All sorts of bad things could have happened to him while helping the beaten man, but he did so anyway. I believe the Lord is calling us stand up for what is right, to do what is right ... to "act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [our] God" (Micah 6:8). Through speech, through action, through inaction ... in this moment, we can point people to Jesus, or we can become one more source of cultural noise.

Which will you choose? 



Dennis Van Kampen is the president and CEO of Denver Rescue Mission in Denver, Colorado. He brings more than 30 years of ministry experience to his role, including 14 years specifically focused on mission work. He and his wife, Kelly, are the proud parents of four young adult children.

Dennis will lead a seminar on this topic at the 2026 Annual Conference & Exposition!



"Be the Salt and Light: Practical Ways to Serve Like Jesus in a Divided World" is scheduled for Wednesday, June 10.