

Is There Struggle in Our Struggle?

"We're from America, we don't struggle," my friend looked me in the eye, "Now people in developing countries, *they* struggle."

I could tell he was serious. He'd just returned from his first medical mission in a developing nation. He'd worked with scattered pockets of people who were ravaged by what we call "easily-treatable" diseases in the US.

And he said again, "We don't know what real struggle is, our tomorrow is known, we'll go to work, eat lunch, go to the doctor if we need to. Tell me how are we struggling? We aren't!"

The look of offense set in my face and I could tell he knew his statement had teeth. He was right. I knew what I'd be doing the next day, the next week and, for some things, we had plans six months down the road. I had no questions about provision in my tomorrow, except "Does my son have football practice?" and "How will we get dinner done for my family between work and my wife's prayer dessert?"

He had my attention. We finished our conversation with him telling me all that happened during the mission trip. As we talked I felt more and more guilt about my life here compared to life "over there".

That conversation with my friend happened 5 years ago. While the loud volume of guilt for being American has been turned down by the speed of American life, one thing has stayed with me. If Americans don't struggle, if I cannot claim struggle, then why do I still feel like life is so hard?

I had to do something about this guilt.

I thought maybe life only feels hard because of my obvious lack of perspective. So I tried to gain perspective by learning more about and being around "unfortunate people". Learned much, but the guilt stayed.

Then I thought the pampered life I lead has made me soft to what's really hard to endure. So I began eliminating what's "unneeded" from my life. No frills, no stockpiling stuff, no useless entertainment or tech distractions. Life became simpler, but the guilt stayed.

Then I decided that I am too unconnected with people. That had to be the source of my insensibility. So I planned to live closely with people, get to know them, see their struggle and then maybe I'd begin to appreciate my lack of having any difficulty in life. I knew people more deeply, but the guilt stayed.

I even went on two mission trips to Haiti. Good work was done, the Gospel was preached; but the guilt stayed.

No matter what I did. The guilt was still present. Nothing washed it out. How could I dare to feel like life is a struggle when so many have so much less than I do? Then, by God's grace, the truth of it hit me.

My grandfather says that, "Guilt never produced anything." And he's right. Guilt is conviction of wrong-doing that moves into your life, puts it's feet on your couch and starts getting mail. It is the specter who makes sure we feel bad enough not to even try to change.

Guilt has a way of being a liar because it can be attached to anything. Ever been around someone who apologizes for every little thing? They apologize constantly because for one reason or another they attach guilt to things they have no responsibility or control over. This elevates the guilty person and the object of guilt to a place where life isn't living.

American guilt for what America possesses is attached to the lie that the human condition in "Stuff-ville" is better than the human condition anywhere else. Like unnecessary guilt in regard to anything, it elevates Americans and our life-style as *the* standard of living. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

Humans struggle, therefore American humans struggle. We struggle to keep our children over-provided for, our politics civilized and our affluence at such a high rate and energy that heart disease or diabetes are bigger killers than cholera or malaria in the US. I believe this says something not about our lack of perspective, our pampered life-style or our lack of connection. It says something about people in general. Even though we have it all, we still cannot understand how we aren't satisfied, so we go for more; and it's literally killing us.

To me that makes us impoverished.

Not financially, not materially, not medically or civilly. [Mother Teresa](#) called it poverty of the Spirit; a poverty of the soul. Much like the Church at Laodicea in Revelation:

"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." Revelation 3:17(NIV)

And because of this, Americans struggle.

The people in Haiti have proven to me that humans can live on exceedingly little and still have God-given joy while Americans can live on exceedingly much and be miserable.

But the converse is also true.

I've met Haitians who see all we have and want the American life so badly that they'll become miserable in their own country trying to get it. And I've met Americans whose guilt from affluence has compelled them to become resident missionaries in developing countries. (never a good idea, read [this](#)) Then they return after a time, dejected and confused because the guilt is still there and the struggle is still present.

No matter who you are and where you live, all humans struggle; it's part of being alive.

This is just the bad news, to hear the good news, click [here](#)