

INFRASTRUCTURE AND INNOVATION

SDG 9

BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND FOSTER INNOVATION

9



- Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.
- Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product.
- Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets.



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The ninth goal uses some very big words: infrastructure, industrialisation and innovation. Behind the big words are big ideas and big ambitions.

While I don't find any of these big words in the Bible, the ideas behind them certainly are there. Christians are invited to pray for wisdom and courage so that the ambitious ideas are not just the ideas of mankind, but ideas that promote God's vision of social justice.

It is no mystery why the nations of the world have made industrialisation an objective. Industrialisation has created the unmatched material prosperity that is now experienced by people in the 'more developed' world. And until the 'less developed' nations experience growth in the industrialisation of their economies, they will lag further and further behind.

Conversely, industrialisation causes massive changes in work. For example, industrialised agriculture uses machinery for planting, irrigating and harvesting, and in the process forces farm labourers out of work. What are they to do instead? And where will they do it? The

'darkest England' in which William Booth ministered was in turmoil because masses of people had moved from the country to the city in search of work. And too often the work they found nourished neither their bodies nor their souls. The leaders of industry became phenomenally wealthy - the workers destitute. When William Blake wrote of England's 'dark satanic mills', he wrote about the impact of industrialisation. What happened in Blake and Booth's 19th century could happen in our 21st century. We need to pray and work intelligently to see that it doesn't.

Infrastructure refers to the roads, bridges, railway lines and airports that make the movement of people and goods possible. It refers to the supply of water and electricity and the safe disposal of waste that makes a country liveable. Nowadays it refers also to the 'information superhighway' (internet) and telecommunications systems.

I once heard an inspiring story that linked innovation with infrastructure. In 2001, famine had left Malawian William Kamkwamba's family eating only one meal a day. Without money for

school, William found books on science. The illustration of a windmill intrigued him. The words said that windmills could create electricity and pump water. With fortitude and ingenuity, William scrounged materials from the junkyard - a discarded tractor fan, old bicycle frame, shock absorber, melted plastic piping and a used dynamo. Eventually, his family extended their days with four small lights powered by the windmill-generator his labours had created. Then he built a second windmill that pulled water from a small well near his home to irrigate his family's farm. As a result, they began growing two crops of maize a year.¹

The material conditions of human life impact the spiritual conditions; and the spiritual health of a people impacts its infrastructure. The interplay is not simple or always the same, but it is real. God has made people to be embodied souls and ensouled bodies. As we pray about SDG 9, and about resilient infrastructure, industrialisation and innovation, we need to pray that the economic and political leaders of the world will realise the connection.

1 Learn more at his TED talk (https://www.ted.com/talks/william_kamkwamba_how_i_harnessed_the_wind) and the ISJC resource 'Think on These Things' (https://issuu.com/isjc/docs/think_on_these_things).



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

- The Bible doesn't talk about the internet or wind-generated electricity, but it actually speaks about the concept of infrastructure. One of the things that makes the picture we are given of the New Jerusalem a delight is that it is solidly built, well-watered and superbly lit; roads from north, south, east and west point towards it, and people from everywhere can travel them without fear. There is no better portrayal of 'resilient infrastructure' than this.
- The Bible also shows us infrastructure being used for unjust purposes. Ephesians 2 describes how Christ came to tear down and destroy the walls of hostility that had been erected for the purpose of keeping people apart. This reminds us that resilient infrastructures - such as iron curtains, bamboo curtains and razor-wired borders - are not necessarily good or just or in keeping with God's vision.
- When the apostle Paul described Jesus Christ as the 'cornerstone', he used material infrastructure as an analogy for spiritual infrastructure. But when the Book of Nehemiah describes the rebuilding of Jerusalem, it uses the language of infrastructure straightforwardly. It's an informative story of repairing walls and buildings and securing points of border-crossing after Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians. One thing that makes it informative is the various ways in which it reminds us that being a 'Restorer of Streets' (Isaiah 58:12) matters materially and spiritually. The two are connected.

WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR?

- Give thanks to God, the Creator, Preserver and Governor of all things. 'For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything' (Hebrews 3:4).
- For all those who are engaged in the work of rebuilding what has been destroyed by war and animosity, thereby making it harder for people to experience the good things of life.
- For the persistent resolve of national leaders who have pledged to pursue SDG 9.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Take an active role in local planning. Find out about new developments and projects nearby and reflect on the impact. Should you support them? Can you offer suggestions to improve the plans? You might find some useful overlap with SDG 11.
- Encourage scientific development and research. Keep on top of the latest news and discuss the issues with those around you - this kind of conversation could inspire others. Choose new and sustainable technologies which could lead to far-reaching improvements in many of the areas mentioned in *Go and Do Something*.
- The Salvation Army has experience in a number of countries in offering training courses in managing personal debt and programmes to help people get back to work. Could you help with or establish one of these in your community?