



## I Hope Everyone Can Live. I Will Help.

Seth Wispelwey

*“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” - The Gospel According to Mark, 10:15 (NRSVUE)*

Twenty years ago, I received a letter from a six-year-old in Abilene, Texas. I will forever cherish it, faded as it is now. But first, where’s Abilene?! That was my first thought when a big box arrived at my office. I was a recent arrival to Austin, beginning my organizing career in a state that exploded my east-coast frame of reference for size and distance.

I was a bright-eyed addition to the regional [Bread for the World](#) office, helping launch the nascent ONE Campaign “to make poverty history.” My role was to engage and mobilize campuses, congregations, and communities in lifting their civic voices to the halls of power, with a goal of prioritizing and increasing poverty-focused development assistance in our federal budget. Then and now, this type of life-sustaining foreign aid comprises less than 1% of our tax-funded expenditures, yet [its impact is profound](#). I preached the power of what a swelling ocean of phone calls, letters, in-person visits, and petitions to our ostensible representatives could do to amplify and increase these impacts.

And in 2005, a global movement grew to try and eradicate the odious debt levied on impoverished countries ([Jubilee](#)) and prioritize spending on advancing equity and health worldwide. A first grader in west Texas saw a TV special about it with her mom, and pleaded to do something about the kids she saw who yearned for opportunities like hers, but were shackled by a global system designed to extract and oppress their means. Within their own limited means, Katherine and her mom far outpaced my grown-up

groups of advocates around the state: in that box they sent to my office were hundreds of petitions to pass on to Washington, DC, with that letter on top:

“Dear Seth, I hope everyone can live. I will help. Love, Katherine.”

There it is: God’s dreams for humanity distilled into the simplest prayer of a child, with a commitment God and our human siblings yearn to hear. I was undone. Needless to say, I found Abilene on the map and planned my visit. A year later, Katherine got on her first plane (and escalator, subway...). She and her mom joined advocates from around the country on Capitol Hill to bring this message to Congress in person. On her seventh birthday, after a positive meeting with her representative, on her follow-up form for my DC-based colleagues she wrote: “We have to make sure he does what he says he’s going to do.” Do we ever.

As of this writing, much remains unknown about the state of much in our federal government, particularly the future of poverty-focused programs here and abroad. What’s been clear for some time now, however, is that those elected to legislate and lead serve interests that prioritize a vanishingly small minority of (already wealthy, powerful, malignant) people.

It’s also clear that more people are awake to this reality. We are recognizing that traditional forms of exercising civic influence are ignored when it matters most (e.g. genocide), and that injustices we seek to address have their origins in the systems we are appealing to (e.g. racial capitalism). We need a wholesale reckoning with [how our money is spent](#). This is our money, and our significant people power needs to rise up in new ways so it’s spent in new, life-sustaining ways. We recognize more than ever that our societies are woven together in an inextricable web of intersections and mutuality. There are no incomes without outcomes somewhere else. Right now, most of those outcomes do not help everyone live, but a new world is possible, if we have the faith and tenacity of a child. If those who govern us won’t align and meaningfully fight for the present and future we all need, they must be jettisoned, regardless of which “side” they represent.

In the words of poet Martín Espada, I challenge us all to read and [“Imagine the Angels of Bread.”](#) This is the year, beloved ones. This is

always the year.

We will help. May it be so.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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