

Remembering Bryant Myers

A personal remembrance of a mentor, practitioner, teacher, and friend

A Life Spent Walking with Others

Bryant Myers passed away this week, leaving a remarkable legacy in International Development. For many years, he helped Christian Relief and Development Organizations, Seminaries, Churches, and practitioners see poverty and the people experiencing it in new ways. He worked in both the practical setting of World Vision and the academic world at Fuller Theological Seminary. Still, what stands out to me is not his titles or books, but how he encouraged people to think differently.

Bryant had a unique way of slowing conversations. While others rushed to answers, he would stay with the question a bit longer. When people disagreed, he often found what was true on both sides. He never ignored real differences. And when the topic was development, he always brought the focus back to people, their dignity, agency, relationships, faith, hope, and the real changes happening in their lives.

That is why his best-known book, *Walking with the Poor*, is such a fitting title. He did not just write about walking with the poor. He tried to live it. Those of us who had the chance to walk alongside Bryant learned something valuable. *Transformation is not something we give to others. We are changed as well.*

A Life Grounded in Practice

Bryant worked at World Vision International for over thirty years. He held senior leadership roles in development, strategy, mission, and organizational life, including Vice President for International Program Strategy and Vice President for Development and Food Resources. His experience was hands-on, shaped by years spent within the realities of Christian relief and development.

That practical experience was important. Bryant saw how development organizations could become skilled at managing programs but lose sight of the people they are meant to serve. Strategies turn into plans, plans into budgets, budgets into activities, and activities into indicators. In the process, the individual can be forgotten.

Bryant pushed back against this loss of focus. He wanted practitioners to see the person behind each indicator and the community behind every project. He argued that poverty is not just about what people lack. People also have knowledge, relationships, resilience, aspirations, spiritual life, and agency. Ignoring these aspects in development could worsen power imbalances.

This belief became the foundation for transformational development. It also helped his work reach a wide audience. While his ideas started in the Christian development movement, they also engaged with broader development theory and practice. Bryant did not want theology to be separate from real life, and he was

not satisfied with development work that ignored what it means for people to truly flourish. He wanted both sides to be in conversation.

From World Vision to Fuller

In 2006, Bryant became a professor of transformational development at Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Intercultural Studies, and later a senior professor. He brought years of field experience into the classroom. Students met not just a professor who knew the books, but someone who had lived the questions himself.

He served as a bridge between generations of practitioners, those shaped by earlier development movements and those preparing for a rapidly changing world. I believe this bridge-building showed his talent for bringing together the lessons from World Vision, theological questions, and the complexities of development theory into one conversation.

His writing reflected this same integration. He described transformational development as seeking positive change in every part of life: material, social, psychological, and spiritual. He questioned the idea that spiritual and physical aspects could be separated. For Bryant, Christian witness was shown not just in words, but in how we live and treat others. Listening, honesty, and dignity all mattered. The way an organization used its power reflected the God it claimed to represent.

Rethinking What Poverty Means

From my perspective, Bryant's most lasting contribution was his belief that poverty is relational and holistic. It is not just a lack of income, food, shelter, or opportunity. It also involves broken relationships with God, ourselves, each other, and creation.

Today, this idea seems common, but it was difficult to argue when Bryant first developed it. Christian organizations faced a real challenge. Could they pursue justice and material well-being without losing their Christian identity? Could they share the gospel without making people's physical and social needs seem less important? Bryant rejected this false choice. He argued that Christian witness is shown through life, word, and action together, not as separate things.

This view also changed how he saw practitioners' role. Practitioners were not experts who arrived with all the answers, and communities were not empty vessels waiting to be filled. Communities had knowledge, agency, and strengths. Practitioners needed humility to learn from them. Bryant insisted that transformation must go both ways. Those who serve must also be open to being changed by the people they serve.

That idea has stayed with me. Organizations may talk about empowerment but still control how problems are defined, solutions are chosen, and success is evaluated. Bryant encouraged us to be more humble. If people really have dignity and agency, they should help define what transformation means. And if transformation includes identity, relationships, agency, and hope, our ways of evaluating must listen for those things too, not just what is easiest to measure.

Walking with the Poor

Most of us are familiar with his book *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, first published in 1999, with a revised edition in 2011. It became influential because it brought together international development practice, the experience of Christian NGOs, and theological reflection on what transformation means.

I remember the book not just as something Bryant wrote, but as a reflection of who he was. The title itself shows his approach. Walking means relationship, patience, accompaniment, and humility. It is not about fixing, managing, or arriving with a set answer. The revised edition describes physical, social, and spiritual parts of life as closely connected. That was typical of Bryant; he always brought together things others kept separate.

He also edited *Working with the Poor*, and his work covered topics like world mission, globalization, and health and healing. Despite the range of subjects, the same theme runs through his work: how Christians understand their neighbors, their calling, their power, and their responsibility to join in God's work of restoration. Bryant never claimed transformation was easy. He knew real change is slow, difficult, and often hard to measure. His honesty about this was part of his wisdom.

What Kind of Man He Was

His scholarship is important, but what stands out most to me is the person he was. I was lucky to work with Bryant several times, travel with him, and collaborate on transformational evaluation. These experiences showed me how he listened, how he responded to unfinished ideas, and how he respected different viewpoints without losing patience.

Bryant had a rare talent for bringing ideas together. He never rushed to simplify things just because others wanted quick answers. He listened until he understood the deeper connection, then offered a synthesis that included everyone. This did not mean everyone was right, but it meant everyone was heard. I have remembered that ever since.

One day, Bryant asked how many days a year I traveled. I told him about 150. He paused and then said something I have never forgotten: if something happened to me, the organization could replace me in weeks, but my wife could never find another Subodh, and my children could never have another father. He said it simply, without a lecture. This stayed with me because he was reminding me that our mission

should not make us neglect those closest to us. Organizations measure what we contribute, but families feel our presence. Those are not the same.

Tracking the Dollar

I also remember something Bryant said during one of our evaluations. He spoke about the importance of tracking the dollar, not just as accounting, but by following how a dollar moves through a program and asking what real value it brings to a person or community. For Bryant, this was about accountability. Good intentions and activity were not enough. Resources given to Christian organizations came with a responsibility to both the donors and, more importantly, to those meant to benefit. That conversation stayed with me. Years later, it influenced the idea behind the Missional Return on Investment index, which measures the value resources create beyond just financial efficiency. This shows Bryant's gift for finding deeper meaning in everyday things. A dollar was not just money; it stood for trust, stewardship, and the chance for transformation. I now believe good MERL work is really an act of stewardship. Bryant helped me see that.

Transformational Evaluation

I remember another important moment when Dr. Jayakumar brought Bryant, Frank Cookingam, and me together to develop the idea of transformational evaluation. The question seemed simple: what if evaluation did not stop at checking if a project met its outputs? What if it also asked whether people's lives had truly changed- their identity, relationships, agency, and hope?

These questions called for a different kind of evaluation, one that meant spending time with communities, listening to their stories, and using methods that could notice changes not shown in dashboards. Working with Bryant in that group was one of the most important experiences of my career. He showed me that rigor and relationships go together. If we want to measure transformation, we need both. I use this lesson in my own work now. The real question is not just if we can measure something, but if what we measure matches the change we care about. That is part of Bryant's lasting impact. He taught us to ask better questions before collecting more data.

A Legacy That Endures

Bryant leaves behind his family, including his wife Lisa, and an impressive body of work. But his greatest legacy is the people he influenced, students who learned to connect theology and practice, practitioners who learned to see people as partners, and friends and colleagues who, like me, still remember their conversations with him.

I do not want to remember Bryant only as the author of *Walking with the Poor*, a former World Vision executive, or a Fuller professor. Those titles are important, but they do not capture who he was. I remember someone who believed people were more than problems to solve, a teacher who connected

faith and evidence, a practitioner who thought those who serve should also be open to change, and a friend who reminded me my family needed me.

Maybe that is what walking with the poor taught Bryant, and what he taught many of us. Transformation is about relationships. We cannot expect others to change while staying the same ourselves. And we cannot truly serve people if we do not see their dignity, agency, knowledge, and God-given abilities.

Bryant taught us to slow down, listen carefully, ask better questions, and look more deeply. I am grateful I had the chance to walk with him, learn from him, travel with him, and be changed by him. His books will continue to be read, his ideas will keep shaping Christian development, and his students will keep teaching. But for me, his legacy is personal. It shapes how I think about poverty, evidence, transformation, and stewardship. Most of all, it reminds me what it means to give your life to a mission without forgetting those closest to you.

For that, and so much more, I will always be grateful.