

The Parable of the River

One day a group of villagers was working in the fields by a river. Suddenly someone noticed a baby floating downstream. A woman rushed out and rescued the baby, brought it to shore and cared for it. During the next several days, more babies were found floating downstream, and the villagers rescued them as well. But before long there was a steady stream of babies floating downstream. Soon the whole village was involved in the many tasks of rescue work: pulling these poor children out of the stream, ensuring they were properly fed, clothed, and housed, and integrating them into the life of the village. While not all the babies, now very numerous, could be saved, the villagers felt they were doing well to save as many as they did.

Before long, however, the village became exhausted with all this rescue work. Some villagers suggested they go upstream to discover how all these babies were getting into the river in the first place. Had a mysterious illness stricken these poor children? Had the shoreline been made unsafe by an earthquake? Was some hateful person throwing them in deliberately? Was an even more exhausted village upstream abandoning them out of hopelessness?

A huge controversy erupted in the village. One group argued that every possible hand was needed to save the babies since they were barely keeping up with the current flow. The other group argued that if they found out how those babies were getting into the water further upstream, they could repair the situation up there that would save *all* the babies and eliminate the need for those costly rescue operations downstream.

“Don’t you see,” cried some, “if we find out how they’re getting in the river, we can stop the problem and *no* babies will drown? By going upstream we can eliminate the cause of the problem!”

“But it’s too risky,” said the village elders. “It might fail. It’s not for us to change the system. And besides, how would we occupy ourselves if we no longer had this to do?”

