

*"There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole"* I really love this African American Spiritual, based on Jeremiah 46:11. This calming soothing melody is comforting and reassuring. I remember as a young child hearing this hymn and being moved. My vocabulary was a little limited I didn't know about the word "Balm" and I remember asking my mother why are we singing about bombs in church. The question brought a smile and a laugh. "It's not bombs it's balm, it means a healing ointment, a cream that make you better." As I think about my childhood naiveté, I now believe we should be signing and talking about bombs and healing in church. There are many explosions going off in people's lives every day. Some of these explosions are chronic illnesses, like HIV that too often mean a death sentence. How can we help bring healing to those affected? How do we comfort loved ones and families? How do we support ways to mitigate the spread of this plague that has devastated whole generations in Africa, Asia and even here in the United States of America? In the 1980's and 90's, we heard a great deal about HIV and AIDS. Today it seems less on the minds of folks here, especially those who are not directly touched by this disease. It seems to have dropped off the radar screen and has faded into one of many STD we need to be careful about. Oh that it's an African problem we have it under control here. *"People tend to think of AIDS and they think in terms of Africa, and while certainly it's worse there, what we're seeing in some areas of this country, the rates are approaching certain parts of Africa," said Gary Bell, Executive Director of Blacks Educating Blacks about Sexual Health Issues (BEBASHI). Given these disparities, Pernessa Seele, Founder/CEO of the Balm in Gilead, found it frustrating that there is no national plan to address the problem. "We need a national AIDS strategy," she stressed.* The Balm in Gilead, Inc. is bringing healing to those who have been wounded in the explosion and infected or affected by HIV/AIDS through prayer, education, advocacy and service. *"There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole"*, the soothing message still brings comfort and a smile.

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