



DO JUSTICE
LOVE MERCY

SHARING WITH THOSE IN NEED

EPH. 4:28 | 1 JN. 3:17-18 | JS. 2:15-16

Poverty In Culture...

No longer than normal. Con artist in Tuscaloosa. When it comes to unpopular sermons poverty comes in right under a sermon on church discipline or tithing.

- Poverty is political.

One of the most challenging things about talking about poverty is that it's almost impossible to think about it outside of our political climate. Our ideas about poor people and the way we should relate to them are often shaped much more by the media than they are by anything else. Just saying the words "helping poor people" pushes us to different sides of the political isle causing some of us to simply side with our team and make up our mind about the poor before we even open the Bible and hear what God has to say. To make things more difficult, poverty is also...

- Poverty is complex.

I'm not trying to offer sociological or economic analysis of poverty today, but suffice to say that the causes and solutions to poverty aren't simple. For example, last week I told you that according to Harvard, Roanoke ranks in the 98% for upward economic mobility. That means it's harder to get out of poverty here than just about anywhere else. Now most people—myself included—are happy to say that personal responsibility and effort play a significant role in the poverty equation. But almost no one would be willing to say that the poor people in Roanoke are 98% lazier or less intelligent than the poor people everywhere else. There are other factors in play, ranging from education to infrastructure making upward economic mobility, complex. Add to that...

- Poverty is uncomfortable.

Most evangelical churches won't touch it. Many of us are familiar enough with the Bible to know that we're supposed to care for the poor, but enough to how what that's supposed to look like. As soon as try, we're overwhelmed with all the needs in light of our limited time and resources. Especially in Roanoke. 11.2% state wide, but closer to 20% in Roanoke. So many of us just don't know what to do. Kevin DeYoung describes the frustration well. "We can't give to every organization helping the poor. As result, many of us give up on every doing anything because the demands are so many. We just put "helping the poor" in the disobedience column and start thinking about football."

And I don't want us to do that. I don't want us to disobey God's word on the one hand and I don't want you to live with a low-level guilt for not helping every person you come across. What I do want to do over the next 35 or so minutes is to give you a biblical framework for sharing with those in need. I want to remind you that we ground our lives in the truth of Scripture. And my job is not to present a Fox News or CNN version of this issue but to present it as God has presented in it the text. And if you stick with me, I promise, that you will walk out of here with a more biblically shaped perspective on the poor and a variety of practical tools you can use in discerning who to help and how to help them. **Pray.**

The Poor In Biblical Perspective...

- God shows unique concern for the needy. (Ps. 72:12-14)

We said last week that over and over again in the Bible, God shows unique concern for the most vulnerable people in society—specifically four groups of people. Orphans, widows, immigrants, and the poor or needy. And we're talking about that last group this morning. Ps. 72 says it this way "For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight." (Ps. 72:12-14) God cares for the needy, and like their God...

- All believers are called to...

- ... show concern and care for the needy. (1 Jn. 3:17-18; Js. 2:15-16)

This by itself is not the least bit controversial. If you've read the Bible or just been in the church you know that believers are supposed to care for the poor—we're not even going to spend time talking about whether we should or not. If you're just checking out Christianity and you haven't been around church or read the Bible let me give you two texts to help you see where we're coming from..." 1 Jn. 3:17-18 "17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." Js. 2:15-16 "15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" So we're called to care for the needy and...

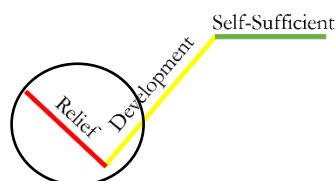
- ... a posture of cheerful generosity. (1 Tim 6:17-18)

1 Tim. 6:17-18 "17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share". Notice the posture here. We're not to have closed hands eager to get as much as we can for ourselves but live with a posture of awareness towards others' needs and a genuine willingness and readiness to share... Paul says it this way. Eph. 4:28, "28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." Why should you go to work and make money. Well in part, so that you can share with those in need. And this is so difficult for us, because since Genesis 3 we're not naturally oriented towards others but towards ourselves. Don't have to teach kids to be selfish. And I would simply pause and ask—is your life marked by generosity and a willingness to share? Do you see your job, for example, solely as a means of providing for yourself or do you also see it in part as God designed means through which you are to care for others?

And yet even if we do have that, we still have our work cut out for us. I hear some preachers take the guilt approach—no one cares, everyone is terrible. There is a place for self-examination and repentance, but I just think people don't know what to do. I want to help but I don't know how. And that's where I want to spend the rest of our time today talking about what this really looks like. And to really get a grasp of what sharing with those in need we need to hone in on exactly what kind of help are we trying to give the needy.

The Nature Of Our Help...

People who study poverty often talk about 3 forms or stages of assistance that are crucial in helping someone move out of poverty. Chart. Explain each one. And the question for us is, where does our personal responsibility intersect their need? What is our primary goal?



And I want to suggest that the vast majority of our personal efforts will be centered around relief. The majority of our care for the poor will express itself in generous acts toward people with immediate needs. Why? Because for the most part, that's what Jesus did and taught.

- Jesus focused on generous actions more than social reform. (Lk. 4:18, 14:13-14; Mt. 25:31-46 Mk. 10:46-52, 14:7)

And before I explain that further I know some people may already be disappointed with that. The people who are often quote Lk. 4:18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This is why Jesus came—to advance social justice including eliminating poverty on a socioeconomic level. So we should be going far beyond acts of relief.

But if that's what he came to do, he didn't do it well. We don't have a record of him ever freeing someone from prison—not even John the Baptist. Jesus never brought a poor person from poverty to self-sufficiency. In fact, in Mk 14:7 he goes so far as to say the poor will always be with you and you can help them anytime you want. His approach was different. He said that he came to seek and save the lost and along the way he demonstrated genuine acts of kindness to the least of these. He said in Lk 14 "when you throw a feast invite the poor the crippled the lame the blind and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you". In Mt. 25 he said as much as you clothed and feed and gave drink to the least of the believers, you did them to me."

And so in keeping with the example and teaching of Jesus—and the rest of the Word—I think our primary goal in sharing with those in need is not to eliminate poverty on a socioeconomic level—which Jesus says won't happen—but rather to be willing and ready to share with individuals need and be rich in kindness as God gives opportunity. Which then leads us to another question who are we going to help? There are so many people! There is no way we can personally help every one. We have limited resources, so how do we go about deciding who are going to be the recipients of our generosity. And fortunately, the Bible gives us some very helpful guidelines here. **Chart!**

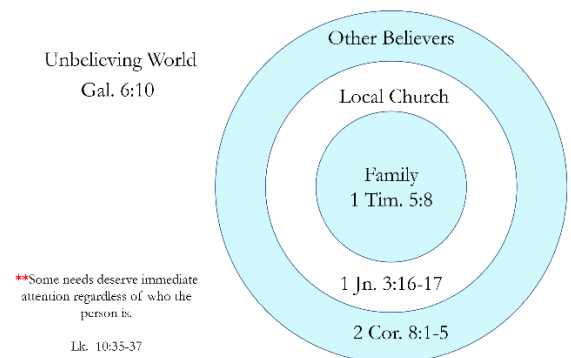
The Recipients Of Our Help...

If you'll look at the screen with me, it's helpful to think our responsibility to the poor in concentric circles with our highest level of obligation in the center and with decreasing levels of obligation as we move out. Said differently, there is a hierarchy of priority when it comes to our generosity and we are not obligated to all the needy equally.

First Family: 1 Tim 5:8 "8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Local Church: 1 Jn 3:17, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" Believers you're in close proximity with most naturally your local church. As soon as Acts 6, you see care for widows in the local church. Not just an act but a systematic—1 Tim 5. Part of covenant membership at New Century is a commitment to help one another and bear one another's burdens.

Other Believers: In our city or world. In 2 Cor. 8, for example, Paul is taking up an offering for the poor in Jerusalem who live over 800 miles away. And yet while he wants them to give he says very clearly that he not commanding them to do so. Obligation just isn't the same as family and believers in the local church.



Last is Unbelieving Poor: I referenced the believing poor a lot because the vast majority of verses in NT are directed toward the believing poor. Gal 6:10 says, “10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” So here there is a priority on the believing but also a general appeal to do good to all people as you have opportunity—this would include the homeless person you pass by or the random person who asks for help at the gas station. So if I’m asking myself who is going to be the object of my generosity I’m thinking through these concentric circles. Anyone in my family? And as we work through those, we want to abide by three principles. First...

- We shouldn’t enable!
 - 2 Thess. 3:10

If a man isn’t willing to work he shouldn’t eat. In this case there are a bunch of people who are idle—they’re lazy—and Paul says they shouldn’t eat and if they don’t start trying to work they should be put out of the church. We should never do for people what they are able to do for themselves. Never enable destructive habits be they habits of laziness or sin... second...

- Opportunity ≠ obligation

If you pass by 10 homeless people on the way home, that does not represent 10 moral obligations. It represents 10 opportunities—10 possibilities. And as someone ready to share living with a posture of generosity, you may help some or you may help none of them—because you have people in your other circles that you’re helping. So it’s really up to you. This keeps people from feeling overly guilty. You don’t have to help everyone.

The third clarification would be that we learn from the parable of the Good Samaritan. Some needs are so immediate and you are in such a position to help that not to would be wrong. Child on door step. Someone is bleeding out in the road. So when we think about who to help, we think in levels of differing priorities, remembering that we don’t want to enable laziness or sinful habits, and also that not every opportunity amounts to a moral obligation. Which then brings us to the question “Ok, once I’ve identified folks, what do I do?”

5 Strategies For Extending Generosity

- (1) Consider building a mercy fund into your budget.

Everyone can do something.

- (2) Purchase goods/services directly.

- Use it as an opportunity to share the Gospel!

Guy in Chattanooga.

- It is rarely, if ever, wise to give cash.

Sizemores did giftcards

- (3) Connect people with local organizations.

- Jobs for Life, TAP, Rescue Mission, HAT.

This is more development!

- (4) Give to your church.

- Benevolence fund, Westside.

- (5) Consider sponsoring an international in poverty.

- Compassion, World Vision, Heifer Intl.

The Fuel For Generosity

- Realize that everything you have has *ultimately* been given to you by God. (1 Cor. 4:7; Deut. 8:18)

“¹⁷ You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.”

Paul is so blunt to say, “For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor. 4:7)

- Remember Christ’s poverty on your behalf. (2 Cor. 8:7-9)

“We want you to know, brothers,[a] about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor[b] of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

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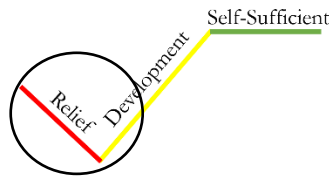
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- All believers are called to...
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 - ... a posture of cheerful _____. (1 Tim 6:17-18)

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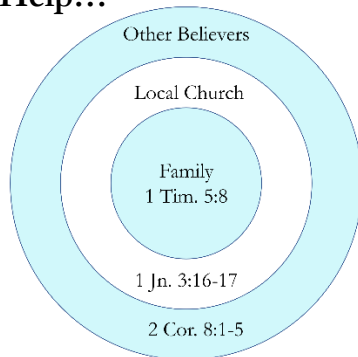
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The Recipients Of Our Help...

- We shouldn't _____!
○ 2 Thess. 3:10
- Opportunity ≠ _____

**Some needs deserve immediate attention regardless of who the person is.
Lk. 10:35-37



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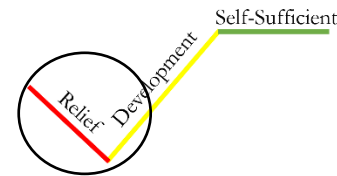
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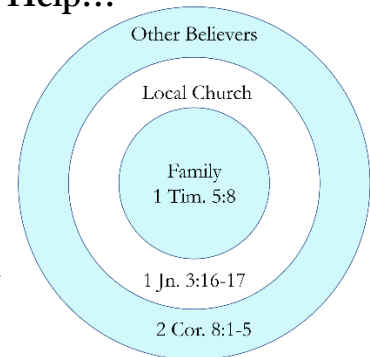
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