

A Lifestyle of



Compassion

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***A Series of Guided Bible Studies on
Building Compassion for the Poor and Needy***

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Preface

Matthew 9:35 *Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.*

Following Jesus Christ is a way of life. It involves following the teachings and example of Jesus in everything we do; striving to live each day according to the Sermon on the Mount. Preaching the gospel is one part of that striving. However, Jesus also calls us to imitate his heart, to love others as we love ourselves, and to be willing to sacrifice to meet the needs of others. The call to serve the poor and needy among us is more than a call for some of us to participate in an occasional program or to contribute a few extra dollars. We believe that the Word of God challenges Christians to make it a way of life: *the compassionate lifestyle.*

The studies contained in this booklet were prepared to strengthen our own convictions regarding the importance of serving the poor and needy. Also included are real-life examples of how disciples today and in earlier times have put these convictions into practice. Our hope is that the Scriptures and examples provided herein will encourage further study, personal reflection, decisions, and even repentance. God is calling each of us to a distinctly Christian lifestyle that frees up the time and resources so that we can help others in need.

Chapter 1: The Footsteps of Jesus

Overview

As followers of Jesus, he must be the center of all we do. Being his follower means walking in the footsteps of his immense compassion in everything he did, whether it was for a close companion, fellow Jew, Samaritan, or Gentile. Without compassion, there will be no genuine meeting of needs for those around us. The purpose of this study is to emphasize the compassion of Jesus and to clarify the need for followers to work at having the compassion of Jesus. The study examines the question: How can a man who claims to be a follower of Jesus not follow his example of compassion?

Following the Footsteps of Jesus

1 John 2:4-6 *“The man who says ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. this is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him, must walk as Jesus did.”*

1 Peter 2:25 *“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”*

I am called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The concept is not theoretical, but intensely practical. The claim I make to “live” in him is semantically the same as “walking” as Jesus did. It’s the same word in the original language. It involves a mindset; a lifestyle; a way of living that mimics those characteristics I find in my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There is no more salient driving force behind the life-walk of Jesus than that of intense love for the people who surrounded him. This is not an understatement. “God is Love” - Jesus is God. The mis-observance in Jesus of the embodiment of the expanse of God’s love for people is a common shortcoming of my faith in the nature of God. From his closest allies, to the casual followers, to the persons in need who thronged around him, to the disenfranchised women and outcasts, to the self-centered and calloused religious legalists, to his most vengeful enemies who finally thought they bested him in his death, Jesus live-walked on the path of love - to the very end - setting me an example and calling me to do the same.

Jesus said that my claim to life-walk in his footsteps of love is the beacon that allows all men to know that I am *his* disciple. It will be my love for other people, from my closest

ally to my most vengeful enemy, that will set *me* apart as a son of God and make me mature in God's eyes (Matthew 5:43-48), and when this maturity has come, then all the childishness and immaturity of the world will fall away behind me. (1 Corinthians 13:9-11)

This amazing love for others *can* be a felt, but to the larger extent, the agape love that Jesus spoke of is a decision. Moment by moment, I am called upon to best my feelings and decide to love as Jesus did. In the instant, I must call upon my inner self to love, regardless of my fear, my anxieties, my busyness, my selfishness, my impatience, and every other dimension of my sinful nature. It is in that fraction of a moment when I have to decide how to act that I can decide to overrule my nature and act in love; to touch the untouchable, to talk to a person I fear, to give to the person who has repeatedly taken, to turn my left cheek to the person who slapped my right, to offer my cloak to the person that is trying to take my coat, or to walk a second mile with the selfish brute that has already forced me a mile out of my intended way.

It is this kind of decision that makes me a disciple of Jesus and a son of God. It is this mindset that goes beyond what the pagans do naturally by feeling, and that allows them to stop when they stop feeling. It is this dimension of deliberate loving that casts out fear and heaps burning coals on the heads of our enemies, so that the whole world is silenced in their criticism.

The extension of my love to those around me, the visceral emotion that tunes me into the needs that I see, is compassion. In the Bible, the Greek word from which it is translated is the word for *bowels*. It is that deep, often physical, feeling I have when I have truly devoted myself to love that causes me to react and then act in love when I see a need unmet in the world, or an injustice levied against the weak at the hands of the powerful, or unjust pain, fear or trauma on the helpless. It is the driving force behind helping the orphans and the widows, the hungry, the poor, and the downtrodden.

Compassion is a fulfillment of the Golden Rule. I know what I would be feeling as I observe such situations, and Jesus taught me to make sure that I am pro-active as I reach out and treat others in ways that would not offend them, as I am offended by what I am seeing. In the same way that I am called to love, I am also called to extend my love to others in compassion: to weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn; to bind up the wounded and lift up the faint, to feed the hungry and give to the poor; to touch the lives of people with the love of God.

The purpose of this is to be like God. It is to touch others as God continually touches me. Compassion is showing grace and I extend it because God has extended it to me.

To turn aside and walk by on the other side of the road is an insult and a grave hypocrisy to my claim to be a disciple of Jesus.

Like love, compassion is a decision that I can make. God *chooses* to be compassionate. In Romans 9:15, Paul says “*For he (God) says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”*” It is overwhelming for me to think about how compassionate God has chosen to be toward me, when I understand that it was actually his choice to do so! In that moment, when my inner parts are stirred, I, also, can choose to act. Instead of turning aside or hurrying on, I can stop to listen, to touch, to wait, to share, to give, to sacrifice, and to be like Christ. Paul admonishes me in Colossians 3:12 to “*clothe myself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*” Clothing is something I *choose* to put on. It’s not an accident or an afterthought. Neither is compassion.

Jesus’ life was a testimony to the compassion of God. In Isaiah, it was said of Jesus that “*A bruised reed he will not break off, a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*” (Isaiah 42:3) He would never overpower the weak and the faint, but rather lift them up. When I am weak and burdened, I can lay my burdens on him and he will carry them. This was not just a practice of Jesus, it was his way, his lifestyle, his mindset. Yes he expected people to respond with gratitude but he gave them grace even when they did not.

Jesus allowed the woman to wash his feet with her hair, when all Simon could see was a man violating the law by allowing her to touch him. Jesus defended the woman caught in adultery because he saw the evil motives of her captors, but admonished her to leave her life of sin. Jesus spoke to the woman at the well; even his disciples were surprised. Jesus touched the lepers, which was against the law. Jesus ate at the house of Zacchaeus, the sinner and tax collector. Jesus healed the blind man on the Sabbath to the protest of culture and the law keepers. When the shepherds of Israel had retreated into their isolated self righteousness and left the people without spiritual guidance, Jesus looked at the crowds and had compassion on them in their abandonment.

Jesus’ compassion ceased when confronted with those bound in legalism, where their legalism resulted in behavior that violated the Golden Rule, the law of love and compassion. When conformance to their culture and love of the law trumped the law of love, then God’s compassion ceased and Jesus’ indignant rebukes were forceful and direct.

So who am I? If I claim to live in him, I must live as Jesus lived, with unbridled compassion for those around me.

Decision: Meet the Needs of the Man with the Cardboard Sign

I am driving to meet my parents for lunch at their assisted living place. It's hot and the traffic is stop and go. Everyone is irritated because their journey to the mall is impeded by other people in the same hurry. I am fifteen cars back from the light and I notice the man with the cardboard sign, walking down the rows of stopped cars. Stoic faces stare ahead not wanting to make eye contact, windows rolled up tight, air conditioners on full, the radio distracting them from all reality outside their private environment. My nature wants to hide. I have twenty seven dollars in my wallet, plus a couple credit cards. Satan is whispering in my ear that this man must be a derelict, because anyone who wants to work can find work, even if it is flipping burgers somewhere for minimum wage. "He's exploiting you", "you are just going to 'enable him'", "he's unlikely to open to the gospel." I have a decision to make. Stoic resistance or a bit of compassion? Stubborn embarrassment or a bit of generosity?

The light changes but the intersection is clogged so we advance six car lengths before we are stopped. I think about Jesus. I cannot think of a time when Jesus explained to his disciples the concept of *enabling* people and how careful they had to be with stewardship of their cash. I *can* think of numerous occasions where Jesus stopped and gave people his attention and time. I think about the Good Samaritan. I think about the extra mile. I think about the cloak and the coat. The man is approaching, his dull eyes hardened to the task of trying to arouse the stony faces and rolled up windows. I think about the awful judgment I have levied on this man without cause. He is two cars away. I have a decision to make: am I going to be like me? like my society? or will I be compassionate without judgment, like Jesus? Is the extension of my compassion really predicated on whether a person is "open?" I shudder at my sinful heart.

I open my wallet and take out ten dollars - no fifteen - I have *decided* to be like Jesus and trust that compassion is the greater good. I could have just given him my free change, but Jesus said to go beyond what is asked. "I bet he's just going to spend it on liquor," Satan whispers. Jesus says confidently, "that does not matter, you are to love your neighbor as yourself. This is my command, second only to your love for God. People who hate their neighbors and enemies, well, the pagans do that, but if you want to be a son of God, you must be different. Give and it will be given to you. Trust me."

I roll down my window. "Here," I say, "May God bless you through this." The man smiles, "God bless you!" The way he says it is genuine. I want to ask him if there is anything else he needs. The light changes and we are still engaged. The man behind me lays on his horn. The beggar, whose name I will never know smiles. "You better go."

I ease off the brake and look in my rear view mirror. The storm in the man's eyes behind me says it all. Unhappy, angry, frustrated. I am stopped by the light before I make it through. The man behind is livid. But I have been compassionate, by an act of will; by an act of faith. Faint as the effort was, I am more like Jesus now than I was ten minutes ago, and I am satisfied that this was right, that the blessing of the money given will be remembered in eternity, even *if* the man who got it gets drunk because of it.

The light is long. My mind turns to the idea of *enabling* and I realize how incredibly *enabled* by God I am. I call his enabling *blessings*. I try to think what my life would be like if God's blessings in my life were determined by my use of them for what God wants. I would probably be riding a bicycle instead of my air conditioned car. "Internet?" God would sneer. "It might enable you to sin. Cell phone? Computer? Jesus did not need any of those things. If I gave them to you, you might use them for something other than my glory. Heaven forbid!" Since we know God knows us perfectly, and his judgment is perfect, He is the only one who would have the right to do such a thing, but even then, he does not. My imperfect judgment leaves me no reason to withhold my compassion on those who have less.

In the logical end to such thinking, anything beyond what Jesus had *enables* me to be self-reliant and not dependent on God. Suppose that He only gave me enough food so that I could never have the opportunity to waste it, or not be thankful. My diet each day would probably be a handful of rice, some water, a chicken drumstick, and maybe a sprig of broccoli. Instead, God sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous, and as I look around, his enabling has resulted in avarice and gluttony on scales that are hard to enumerate. Yet he continues to give without judgment, even when only a fraction of his creation turns back to acknowledge him.

Decision: Make Time to Visit the Sick

It's 5:30 on Monday morning. I asked God this morning to be more compassionate and now I am planning my day - charting it out - planning to be at work early to wrap up some important matters before my upcoming vacation. The phone rings. My sister said "Dad's in the emergency room. I am with him. I know you are busy so you do not need to come but just wanted you to know." My dad is not a Christian - of any form. He says he is not afraid of death, but I know he is. I know what it would mean to him for me to be there with him, but I have been handed the perfect excuse by my well meaning sister. I have a decision to make.

I choose compassion - it's a decision, not a feeling. I know that Dad would be OK if I did not come. I know my sister would take care of everything. A decision either way would work. I think of Jesus. He stopped to have lunch with Zacchaeus; he stopped when the woman touched him for healing. He dealt patiently with the crowds, healed the sick late into the night - he saw the pain in the eyes of the crowds.

I choose compassion. I walk into the emergency room at 6:05 AM and find my dad. He says, "Oh for goodness sake, what are you doing here? You did not need to come." The next thing he says is. "Whatever you do, don't miss your plane for me." I spend an hour with him. Work can wait. I will figure out how to get it done. God will bless this effort. I leave knowing that I did what was right.

Decision: Fellowship with the Brother That Needs to Talk to Me

As I start up the aisle at church, I see a brother in front of me who always wants to talk to me. I don't know why. He occupies my fellowship time in a way that keeps me from seeing the people I need to see. I know I could nod and then duck down row between chairs as if I had some important errand to attend. I could avoid making eye contact and busily engage someone else. I think about Jesus. I cannot think of a time he turned away or behaved like that. He loved everyone. "I don't have that capacity" I think to myself. I have a decision to make:

I choose love and compassion. The brothers that I *need* to see - I have their phone numbers - cell phone numbers - I can call them anytime - even in their cars as they are leaving the parking lot after I missed them. I head straight to this brother, hug him warmly and tell him I love him. He hugs me back very tightly. I still do not know why he needs to talk to me or exactly how my small gesture of compassion will fill that need, but having made a decision to act this way frees my soul as only Jesus could probably explain. A simple act of faith and deliberate will, has opened my heart and made me just a bit more like my claimed master.

Every day I discover small corners of life where I can inject compassion into the stream of humanity, and every such injection requires a conscious decision. These experiences validate the power of love and the grace of God. I have also found that if I wait for the grand gesture, the visible display of my magnanimity replete with trumpets and photo ops to demonstrate my compassion, I am left hollow and discouraged, having received my reward in full

Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Although compassion is not in the list that Paul gave us (Galatians 5:22-23), the link between compassion and love tells me that compassion is inspired by the Spirit. With each turn in this world, when I have made that decision to stop quenching the spirit's fire, I am continually confronted with opportunities to show compassion. It will never stop being a decision, but the next decision gets easier with each successful decision to be compassionate.

I am learning slowly, that I need to be compassionate because in doing so, I become more like God; I become more like Jesus. If I fall into the trap of only showing compassion if it will help my evangelism, I am not really being compassionate. I am being manipulative. Those I serve feel that and they hate it. I hate it and soon the hypocrisy steals my joy, and I stop giving. Freely open compassion is genuine and irresistible.

Conclusion

I am called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The concept is not theoretical, but intensely practical. The claim I make to "live" in him is semantically the same as "walking" as Jesus did. It's the same word in the original language. It involves a mindset, a lifestyle, a way of living that mimics those characteristics I find in my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Matthew 9:36 *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."*

Matthew 14:14 *"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick."*

Matthew 15:32 *"Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.'"*

Matthew 20:34 *"Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him."*

Mark 6:34 *"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things."*

Mark 8:2 *“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.”*

Luke 7:13 *“When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don’t cry.’”*

Luke 15:20 *“So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”*

Luke 19:41-42 *“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.’”*

Romans 9:15 *“For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’”*

2 Corinthians 1:3 *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.”*

Colossian 3:12 *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”*

James 5:11 *“As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”*

Chapter 2: Spiritual Obstacles to Serving the Needy

Overview

This study examines greed and material – love of money – and other obstacles in our lives that keep us from being compassionate and serving the needy.

The Foundation for Serving the Poor: Loving Others as Ourselves

a. Read Matthew 22:35-40

1. Jesus said everything hangs on the two greatest commandments.
2. He said that Leviticus 19:9-18 was the second greatest commandment in all of Scripture.

a. *“But you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD”*

b. Read Luke 3:2-6; then Luke 3:7-9

1. Jesus later said of John, *“among those born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist!”* (Luke 7:28)
2. What made John the greatest of all the prophets, greater than Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Moses, Daniel?

- He preached the wrath to come. Warned them that if they did not bear good fruit, they would be thrown into the unquenchable fire!!!
- The people asked, what kind of fruit?
- Read Luke 3:10-14. John answers with three challenges, all related to one’s money and possessions.
 - First challenge: *“He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none.”*
- This is simply implementing the command to *“love your neighbor as yourself”*.
 - Let it sink in!
 - This is not Marxism, not left-wing politics, not socialism. Call is to do it voluntarily, giving own possessions to others, caring for them exactly as we care for ourselves.
 - What would you have done if John told you that? What would you do if Jesus told you to do that? Implications of living like this are very disturbing. Yet according to John the Baptist, the implications of not doing it are far more disturbing!

What Did Jesus Teach Regarding Wealth, and Helping the Poor?

a. Sermon on the Mount begins, *“blessed are the poor in spirit.”* But consider parallel passage. Read Luke 6:20-24.

1. *“Blessed are you poor; woe to you who are rich; you have received your consolation.”*

2. Compare to Rich Man and Lazarus account; read Luke 16:19-25 “*in your lifetime you received your good things.*”

b. Read Matthew 6:19-21

1. “*Do not lay up treasures on earth ... but lay up treasures in heaven.*”

- Matthew 6:24 Jesus says you can't serve God and Mammon/money.

c. Jesus' warning of the third soil. Read Matthew 13:22.

1. For those among the thorns: “*cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.*”

d. Read Luke 16:9-13

1. “*Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon (money) so that when you fail (or when it fails) they may receive you into an everlasting home.*”

- If you aren't faithful with the money you've been given in this life, don't expect true riches later.
- Cannot serve both God and money!”

Could I Really Lose My Salvation Because of This?

a. Consider the example Jesus tells of in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, in Luke 16:19-31.

1. Rich man was “*clothed in fine purple and linen and fared sumptuously every day,*” while Lazarus lay at his gate, desiring the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. The rich man was consigned to the place of torment, with no relief.

b. Shortly before he was crucified, Jesus tells his disciples what he will be looking for when he returns, in Matthew 24:32-25:46. He warns them to be ready at any time.

1. Jesus will be like a master who leaves his servant with instructions to feed and attend to his fellow servants. (Matthew 24:45-51)

- If he finds us treating our fellow servants badly (not taking care of the needs of others) and eating and drinking with drunkards (living unholy lives), the wicked servant will be “*cut in two*” and assigned a place with the hypocrites, a place of regret with “*weeping and gnashing of teeth.*”

2. In the story of ‘the Sheep and the Goats’ in Matthew 25, Jesus portrays final judgment.

- The basis of judgment in this account is how those who believed in him treated “the least of my brothers.”

c. Paul warns us in 1 Timothy 6 that the love of money will destroy us. He urges those who have, to share, and to use what they have to do good to others.

d. Sodom is a foreshadowing of the final judgment and destruction of the wicked by fire in the end (Jude 7, 2 Peter 2:6). Ezekiel 16:49-50 tells us that the sin of Sodom was that

they were overfed, unconcerned, self-indulgent, and did nothing to help the poor and needy!

Conclusion

The foundation for helping the poor and needy is to “*love our neighbors as ourselves.*” It is simply obeying the second greatest commandment. The greatest spiritual obstacles to doing this are the sins of selfishness, self-indulgence, greed, materialism, and the love of money. If we do not repent of these sins, Jesus plainly teaches that he will reject us when he returns.

Chapter 3: Generous and Willing to Share: The Extra Mile

Overview

God gives us every good thing in our lives but makes it clear that whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly. In 1 Timothy 6:18, Paul commands the rich to be generous and willing to share. We have many opportunities to share the abundance that we have been given by God. The purpose of this study on generosity is to examine the heart and actions of Jesus and the disciples, and to empower us to go the extra mile in our lives of giving.

Introduction

1 Timothy 6:17-19 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be **generous and willing** to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

Paul calls those who have worldly riches to make a decision to place their hope in God and not in their possessions which He has given for our enjoyment.

- If it can be commanded, then we can make a decision to change
 - Change what? Where do we put our hope? Generosity is the decision to trust in God and use what he has given us for the purpose that it was given.
- Commands:
 - Not to be arrogant
 - Not put hope in wealth
 - Put hope in God
 - To do good
 - To be rich in good deeds
 - To be generous and willing to share

By following these commands, we will store up treasure in heaven and take hold of life that is truly life – eternal life!

Old Testament Promise – Generosity Brings Blessings

Psalm 37:25-26 *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed. (Also read Psalm 112:1-7)*

- Consistent principle – the righteous are taken care of and their children fed even though they are always generous and lend freely (equivalent to conducting affairs with justice)

- Generosity is a characteristic of the righteous
- Being generous and lending freely are the same action
- Good will come to the one who is gracious, compassionate and righteous – he is generous and lends freely
- No fear of bad news – heart is steadfast and trusts in the Lord (Psalm 112)

Proverbs 11:24-30 *One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell. He who seeks good finds goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it. Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf. He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.*

Teachings:

- Generous people will prosper
- Refreshing others causes you to be refreshed
- Selling grain is considered to be generous as opposed to hoarding it
 - Generosity is not about money but about attitude
 - In this example, generosity is not about giving but being willing to sell what you have rather than waiting to get the increased value
- If you seek good, you will find goodwill
- Trusting in riches vs. being righteous
- Generosity is equated to righteousness and with the wisdom to win souls
- Lack of generosity prevents us from winning souls
- Generosity is an act of faith that leads to compassion

Proverbs 22:9 *A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.*

Teachings:

- Blessed because he is generous
- Shares his food with the poor – a specific example is provided below

Example: David – 1 Chronicles 29:14-18 *But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. Lord, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you.*

Teachings:

- Ability to be generous comes from God
- Praying for people to continue to have the heart of generosity
- Leaders that willingly give have an impact on the generosity of others
- We need to set the example of generosity

New Testament Instruction to the Corinthians

2 Corinthians 9:1-5 *There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we — not to say anything about you — would be ashamed of having been so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.*

Teachings:

- They were eager to give, had shared with Paul for over a year about it
- Paul boasted about the Corinthians generosity to the Macedonians
- The enthusiasm is contagious
 - Being unprepared can also be contagious
- Do what you promised – there is a challenge in living up to the things that we promise
- We need encouragement and to be spurred along
- Preparation and planning can be the difference between a generous or grudgingly given gift
- Are you known to be a generous person? Generosity does not necessarily mean giving a lot.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

Teachings:

- Sowing and reaping are connected
 - Sowing is something you have to plan and prepare for
 - Fields must be ready
 - Seed must be available
 - Sparingly sowing equals sparingly reaping
 - Generously sowing equals generously reaping
 - There is no large harvest without planning and sowing large!
- **God is/loves a cheerful giver.** Imagine having all of the world's resources and planning to be generous! He doesn't just desire that we give but desires that we become like Him. Being generous is being like God. (Luke 6:35 – lend without expecting to get anything back)
- God is able to give you everything you need to abound in every good work
- Made rich in every way – you can be generous on every occasion
- Your generosity results in Thanksgiving to God! Taking the focus off of us and keeping it on God. How do you do something in such a way that people are amazed by God?

2 Corinthians 9:12-15 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Teachings:

- Service meets people's needs
 - It also causes people to thank God in an overflowing way
 - Serving proves something about you to others
 - Serving demonstrates your obedience that goes with your confession of the gospel. A disciple must be serving others.

Generosity Changes Us Forever

1 Timothy 6:6-10 But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Teachings:

- Godliness with contentment is great gain
- Wanting to get rich is a big trap!

Matthew 5:41-42 *If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

Teachings:

- Once we decide to be generous. it frees us up from having to access the lifestyle, motives, etc. of the person asking for their need. Then we can just be generous.
- Christianity is proactive; generosity is proactive.

New Testament Examples of Generosity

Cornelius – Acts 10:2 *He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.*

Teaching:

- Cornelius was God fearing and gave generously to those in need

Early Church – Acts 4:32 *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.*

Teachings:

- All the believers shared everything they had
- Unified – having one heart and mind

Tabatha – Acts 9:36-39 *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.*

Teachings:

- Always doing good and helping the poor
- All the widows appreciated what she had done for them
- Are men leading the way in being generous?

Looking after Widows and Orphans – James 1:27 *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

Teaching:

- Looking after widows and orphans is pure and faultless to God

Practicals

You know how! – Matthew 7:11 *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*

Teaching:

- God knows that you know how to give good gifts!

Love everyone – Luke 6:27-36 *“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

Teachings:

- Love my enemies, those who curse me, those who strike me, steal from me
- Give to everyone and anyone
- Be proactive
- Love those who do not love me
- Do good to my enemies. Then my reward will be great – like the Most High.
- God is kind and merciful to the wicked – be merciful
- Matthew 5:45 – God sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous

Sacrifice to meet the needs of others – Acts 4:34-35 *There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.*

Teaching:

- No needy people due to their generosity

Give according to what you have – 2 Corinthians 8:11-12 *Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.*

Teaching:

- Being eager and willing to give based on what God has given and entrusted to you

Conclusion

The Bible provides many Scriptures whose teachings make it clear that whoever sows generously will reap generously. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament provide numerous examples of generosity that should inspire us to go the extra mile in the area of giving.

Chapter 4: Brother/Neighbor/Foreigner/Enemy

Overview

Dropping a huge rock into a body of water creates a ripple of waves that roll along getting larger the further away from the entry point. The impact of our acts of service is like waves that ripple from our hands. God instructs us to serve people within our sphere of influence. The list of people we can serve is daunting when we consider our immediate family, parents, siblings, brothers and sisters in our church, neighbors, people we meet on the street or daily lives, foreigners, and yes even our enemies. This study examines biblical teachings on how to prioritize our service as well as to see all the opportunities we have to be like Jesus.

Considerations When Serving Others

Family:

- a. Read 1 Timothy 5:7-8 *Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*
- b. Provide for those in our own household.
- c. Provide for our relatives.
- d. Issues to consider: shelter, food, emotional support, encouragement.
- e. In our society, an aging population will have many needs for the elderly – will that be an issue for your family or relatives?

Family of Believers:

- a. Read Galatians 6:9-10 *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*
- b. Believers in our local church – God has placed us in our own local worship areas. Issue to consider: How can you do good to the brothers and sisters in our ministry? What opportunities do you have? Who could you donate your time to baby sit, mentor, or encourage? Do you go to church looking for those opportunities? Have you become weary of doing good?
- c. Believers in the worldwide church – God’s kingdom is all over the world. What opportunities do you have to help disciples all over the world? In times of crisis, do you respond with financial support? Do you keep in touch with people who move away?

Neighbors:

- a. Read Luke 10:25-37 *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do*

this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

b. Daily opportunities with people who cross our path – how do you respond? Issues to consider:

1. We can't discern how our acts of service or support will be used. Examine our hearts for judgmental thoughts and attitudes in our interactions with people with apparent needs. Let's feel free to give without hesitation when a need is apparent.
2. Do you walk on by when you see someone in need? Are you too busy?
3. The neighbor in this parable went the extra mile. How has that been evident in your life?

Foreigner:

a. Read Deuteronomy 10:17-19 *For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.*

1. What needs are we to meet concerning the foreigners in this passage?
2. How can you love the foreigners?

b. Read Deuteronomy 24:14 *Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns.*

1. Does this apply to your life situation (employer) or any interactions you may have with people from foreign lands?

c. Read Deuteronomy 24:19-20 *When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.*

1. Food for thought: Do you consciously make decisions to aid foreigners? How is that exhibited?

d. Read Matthew 25: 34-36 *Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, **I was a stranger and you invited me in, I***

needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

1. Question: Do you invite strangers into your home? How about people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and countries?

Enemies:

a. Read Matthew 5:39-47 *But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

1. There are no boundaries to those for whom we can provide help. Consider handing over your coat/shirt to your enemy who asks for it. How difficult would that be? How about lending money to an enemy? Full maturity as a disciple is a lifelong process, is it not?

Conclusion

God expects us to love and serve all the people in his creation. God is concerned about all people's needs as well. There are no limits as to whom we can serve. Clearly, God commands us to love one another and has given us clear direction on whom we are to prioritize in our service and care. God does not place a fence around who we should not serve. Spend some time to examine the Scriptures to uncover the more difficult life situations that you have come across. Then consider Jesus' example as he served his family, disciples, neighbors, foreigners, and enemies.

Chapter 5: The Significance of Secrecy

Overview

Matthew 6:1-4 *“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

Why does Jesus tell us to give to the needy in secret? He also tells us to pray in secret (Matthew 6:6) and fast in secret (Matthew 6:18). Elsewhere we are commanded to be generous and willing to share. We are told to go the extra mile. Even Jesus observed the widow's mite and made a comment that she had given everything she had to live on. Why is secrecy important?

Another translation of secret is cryptic or hidden. When we pray, fast or meet the needs of others, we are doing the things that God has commanded. They are not hidden from Him. He wants them to become part of our nature and spirit. Not for our glory or recognition but for his. When we take the focus off of him and look to get credit and recognition for service to Him, it is no longer serving our Lord but ourselves. When we understand this principle, then we are being transformed!

Giving from a Changed Heart

Matthew 25:37-40 *Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ‘The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’*

The attitude and heart they had was one of love and concern for everyone, strangers, homeless, sick, or in prison. The sheep (vs. the goats in this passage) were willing to serve every one of these without looking for the specific reward. When we start to give or serve looking to be recognized, we have already received our reward in full. We are giving for the results rather than giving because we have a changed heart.

How do I know when my heart is becoming more like God's in this area? When the counting is forgotten and the giving from the heart has become the norm. The secrecy is that I no longer think of it as noteworthy but as normal.

Luke 17:7-10 *Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to*

eat’? Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

We become like the unworthy servant. Not expecting recognition from our Lord for our service but looking for additional opportunities to serve.

John 13:34-35 *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Teachings:

- Jesus gave us a new command to love each other as he had loved us.
- Sacrificial love was a new concept.
- It’s still a new concept for us. It’s hard to sacrifice our own interests to meet the needs of others.
- This sacrificial, others-focused love is what stands out in our discipleship of Jesus.

We don’t Understand Secrecy Because We Don’t Understand Love

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

Paul defined love for the Corinthian church because they made it clear that they didn’t understand this new love – loving as Christ loved us. All of the negatives are easy to do when we are public in our giving (part of our love for others):

- Envy
- Boasting
- Pride
- Dishonoring
- Anger
- Keeping track of wrongs (needs)

And so easy to miss out on the good:

- Patient
- Kind
- Rejoicing in the truth
- Protecting, hoping, trusting, persevering!

Practicals

Proverbs 27:21 *The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives.*

Praise tests us. Realize that when we are recognized or praised, it tests our humility. Our faith is that God is the one that accomplishes great things through us and that he, not us, answers our prayers.

Galatians 6:9-10 *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

We have to persevere in doing good. If we want a harvest, we have to plant, water, continue beyond the first sign of success (the seedling), and watch God mature what he is doing. We need to do good to all people.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Even when it doesn't seem like it is going well, God is working our efforts for good as we love Him and follow His purposes!

Conclusion

Secrecy is important! In Matthew 6, Jesus reminded us that God sees everything that we do. He is going to reward us accordingly. He wants us to have the same heart of love and giving that He has. God is a cheerful giver and wants us to be the same. When love is central to our nature, then we won't have to announce our good deeds in order to be rewarded. Good deeds will become a normal part of everything we do.

Chapter 6: What is Poverty?

By Walter Kotkowski

Overview

The thought of defining poverty is overwhelming and beyond my capability as a human being. This study examines God's word, God's plan, and our human efforts in order to begin to implement a plan to change the destiny of many who live in poverty. The answers to eliminating poverty are found in God's Kingdom; beginning in the Old Testament with the nation of Israel, and continuing today in God's Kingdom, the church.

What is Poverty?

It is a very difficult question with many answers. Most people, including myself, initially think of poverty as a lack of material possessions, which is true. However, poverty has many other faces.

During my travel to Afghanistan in early 2002, I experienced poverty among women caused by oppression and fear. I witnessed first-hand the "crime" of girls being forbidden to go to school. The result of this "crime" is an educational poverty for 50% of the population. This type of poverty has devastating impact and lasting effects, not only on the individuals, but also on their family, their community, their country, and the world.

During my 18 years of traveling to Cambodia, I have experienced poverty that resulted from an evil dictator, Pol Pot, who attempted a complete genocide of his people. It is estimated that as many as 4 million people died as a result of his inhumane treatment towards his own people. The nation was left in complete and utter ruin and in extreme poverty, including material poverty (lack of food, clothing, and shelter), psychological poverty (complete destruction of the individual), spiritual poverty (the complete destruction of a spiritual system), and educational poverty (Pol Pot massacred all the educated citizens of Cambodia and eliminated all teaching institutions and infrastructure). The result was a national, all-encompassing poverty affecting the country, the community, the family, and the individual.

I have many more personal examples I could cite such as the tsunami in Indonesia and earthquakes in India, where whole communities were leveled with not a home left standing. I could hear the loud cries of people mourning their dead loved ones as I walked about surveying the ruins and aftermath in these communities. Natural disasters are out of our control, but the end result is complete poverty of a community, the family, and the individual.

Although the thought of defining poverty is overwhelming, I believe with God's word, God's plan, and our human efforts we can begin to implement a plan to change the destiny of many who live in poverty. I believe the answer is in God's Kingdom;

beginning in the Old Testament, with the nation of Israel, and continuing today in God's Kingdom, the church.

Since the creation of the world, God has loved his people and taken care of their needs. Adam and Eve lived in a place where all their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs were met. I guess we could say they lived in luxury. They walked in the Garden of Eden, where God walked, which is amazing! Their sin, however, forced upon them not only the spiritual poverty of separation from God, but also physical and emotional poverty as well. Thankfully, God did not abandon them; instead, He had a plan to take care of them and also a plan to take care of us.

In the Old Testament, God gave Moses many commands instructing Israel to take care of the poor. The Sabbath guaranteed a day of rest for the slave and alien (Read Exodus 23:10-12). The Sabbath year canceled debts for the Israelites, allowed the poor to glean the fields, set slaves free, and also equipped them to be productive (Read Deuteronomy 15:1-8). The year of Jubilee emphasized freedom. It released slaves and returned lands to their original owners (Read Leviticus 25:8-55). Other laws about debt, tithing, and gleaning ensured that the poor would be cared for each day of the year (Read Leviticus 25:35-38; Deuteronomy 14:28-29; and Leviticus 19:9-10). The commands were so extensive because they were designed to achieve the ultimate goal of eradicating poverty among God's people; *"There should be no poor among you,"* God declared (Read Deuteronomy 15:4). Israel was looked upon by the nations outside of Israel as a prosperous nation. Israel experienced God's loving heart, mind, and strength to take care of His people. God did not stop there. He promised the Messiah, the exact representation of His being, His Son Jesus Christ, to deliver Israel and all of mankind from their spiritual, physical, mental and emotional enslavements.

In the early days of Jesus public ministry (Luke 4:16-21), *"He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"*

Jesus is God in the flesh. God now comes to earth and once again proclaims to the Israelites His love for them and His desire to take care of their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs as their Father.

John the Baptist is in prison and sends his disciples to Jesus to ask whether He the one to come or should they expect someone else. Jesus' responds (Matthew 11:4-5), *"Go back and report to John what you hear. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those*

who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”

Jesus continues on his mission to take care of the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden. Jesus continues to pour himself out for the *“least of these”* in our society: the unclean, the enslaved, the unloved, and the unwanted. What does Jesus expect of us as His bride, the Church? In Acts 2, we read the account of the first days of the church. Peter, *“filled with the Holy Spirit,”* delivered the message that Jesus Christ is both Messiah and Lord. Speaking the words God put upon his lips, Peter convicts and inspires the Jews from every nation in attendance, all those who are within his voice range, and 3,000 are baptized into Christ and His church. There are now 3,000 Jewish disciples of Jesus from every nation gathered together in the first Christian fellowship. This was an amazing event in church history. But I am sure this gigantic fellowship presented many challenges of food, clothing, and shelter for those disciples who left their homes and countries to travel to Jerusalem. The Bible teaches us that the challenges were met by the fellowship of believers.

Act 2:44-47 “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Act 4:33-35 “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.”

It is very clear that the Scriptures teach that the Jewish believers met the needs of those in need within their own fellowship. In years past, I thought of this as a new teaching, a new way of life. But today I connect the Old Testament teachings on the poor with the New Testament teachings on the poor. I draw the conclusion that the Jewish disciples were simply putting into practice the Old Testament teaching of taking care of each other, just as God had not only intended, but commanded.

Isaiah 58:7-10 “Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then, you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: ‘Here am I.’ If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

God's people are always upon His heart. The church is always about its mission of evangelizing the world, but it is confined to the Jewish world until Acts 10. Then miraculously in Acts 10 we learn that the kingdom and salvation is about to be opened up and given to the Gentiles, beginning with Cornelius and his family. Why, Cornelius? The Bible gives us the answer to "Why Cornelius?"

Acts 10:2-4 "He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly." "One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" "Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it, Lord?'" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

Once again, God's heart and plan are revealed. Giving to take care of the needs of others is not simply a part of God's being; it is the essence of Him. It is who He is, and what He values most. The Gentile world is now included in His Kingdom, His Family, and will be taken care of by Him, through us the church. It is clearly written in the Old Testament that God provided specific direction for taking care of the poor and needy. God also provided the same specific direction in the New Testament for us, as we are clearly commissioned to take care of his people.

Galatians 2:10 "All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along."

James 2:15 "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed', but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?"

1John 3:16 "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."

1John 3:17 "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"

Galatians 6:9-10 "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

The Scriptures are clear: God desires for his bride, the church, to take care of its children. It is our Biblical responsibility to take care of the poor within our own fellowship. This includes the local congregations, but it also includes the church universal. In today's age of technology and communication, we are able to better understand the poverty within the congregations outside the United States. In Guatemala and Honduras as an example, over 50% of the membership of approximately 1,300 Christians earns \$280 a month or less. As you can well imagine, the needs within these fellowships are great. There is a need for education, healthcare, medicine, clothes, food, safety & security (including safe and healthy homes). I believe

we as a global church have the faith, the capability, and the resources required to help our brothers and sisters in their poverty.

2Corinthians 8:14-15 *At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality...as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."*

How can I/we/you help?

- **Be a voice:** "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves."
- **Study your Bible:** to gain a deeper understanding of God's love for those in need.
- **Pray:** for those who are in need within our own local fellowships, but also for those living in extreme poverty and extremely unhealthy environments, outside the U.S.
- **Give:** of your resources, including money, talents, and time.

Conclusion

Continue to develop God's heart to serve all those in need, but especially the family of believers. By studying the book of Acts and the other Epistles, and acting on our new-found convictions; beginning with our own family of believers, our blood family, **we can help eliminate poverty**, not only within our fellowship but also outside the church in our collective sphere of influence.

Chapter 7: When, Where and How

Overview

God has a plan for each of us to make a difference during our lives. Just as Jesus loved and served people in need, we too are provided opportunities to serve a harassed and helpless world with compassion.

The purpose of this study is to illustrate how the Scriptures' call to serve the poor and needy with compassion has become living and active (Hebrews 4:12) in the lives of various disciples from different life situations.

Secret Servants

Note: In the following examples of secret servants, the names have been changed to ensure the servants remain anonymous.

Fran: The Single Servant

"I've had the opportunity to serve internationally as well as locally in the past few years. I've attended the HOPE Brigades in Central America where I run the blood-work in the lab after it's been drawn. I also went to India and interacted a lot with the kids (painting, building, and just spending time) and people in a leprosy colony." (Read Luke 8:26-39 – serve in uncomfortable areas – get out of our comfort zones with the very needy).

"Visiting the children at the AIDS orphanage in India was an emotional challenge. (Read James 1:27 – serving widows and orphans.) The kids look happy and healthy, but they are far from healthy. Some have full-blown AIDS. But they seem to accept their lot in life and someone helped me to not pity them, but rather appreciate that God is using them to move other people's hearts. That's a hard calling and very hard for me to understand, but they seem content in their situation because it's the one that God has given them."

"While in Guatemala, I visited an orphanage and spent maybe 20 minutes tops with one of the young boys there. I doubted he would remember me after we left... we didn't speak the same language so we couldn't communicate well. (Read Ephesians 5:16 – Make the most of every opportunity). We returned there a year later and as soon as he walked in the door he sprinted towards me and jumped in my arms, then dragged me up to his room, dug to the bottom of a drawer to give me a gift. It wasn't much, just a little wooden heart with gift shop words and black magic marker in one corner. But I knew it had value to him and he wanted me to keep it. In my moments of hesitation when I wonder if what I'm doing makes any difference, I remember that moment and know that twenty of my minutes made a difference for him." (Read 1 Corinthians 15:58 Give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord – your labor in the Lord is not in vain.)

“To be honest, I don't necessarily go looking for the opportunities all the time but I feel that God puts the opportunities in front of me to decide what to do. Being single gives me the flexibility to make my own plans without having to work around other people's schedules. I feel convicted that our service to the poor and needy is absolutely an expectation that God has of us. And while I have the time and the means to work internationally I will do what I can to participate in those programs. I feel blessed that I've been called and as long as God continues to open doors, I will continue to walk through them.” (Read Luke 10: 25-37 Be ready when a need arises.)

Sarah: The College Graduate Servant

“While in college I've served on AmeriCorps in New Orleans and Pennsylvania and volunteered at the Saturday Academy for three years at the Mather School. During my freshman year, I volunteered at an assisted living facility for the elderly, and in my senior year I joined the service committee in campus and organized a meal preparation and serving at Rosie's Place - a shelter for women.” (Read Galatians 2:10 Service is something we are eager to do.)

“When I was in high school I served on a HOPE Youth Corps in Philadelphia. It was a completely life changing experience. I originally volunteered to push my boundaries and hopefully grow. I mentored an 11 year old girl. After 8 days of confiding in each other, sharing laughs, and tears she had taught me heart lessons that my high school could not. She's now in high school and we still catch up now and then. She showed me that serving wasn't just about giving to someone, it was also about receiving.” (Read Proverbs 11:25 A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.)

“Luke 17:6-10 (we are unworthy servants) is without a doubt a scripture that cuts my heart every time I read it. I don't serve because I have extra time or because it looks good on a resume. It's my duty. Just like evangelism or repentance. I don't see it as an optional part of Christianity. As a body we have such a great force and strength to move within the communities where we live. One night of service for us can impact many people and is an incredible way for us to put into practice the unconditional love of God.”

“As a campus student, I had more flexibility in schedule. Free blocks between classes or days free gave me time to serve during the day which is something most 9 to 5'ers are not able to do. Not to mention I lived in the dorms and was on a meal plan so I also had more time on my hands. Of course I felt busy, and to be fair, I was. I had clinical 24+ hours a week plus my full class load, bible talk and bible studies. But I trusted those around me and those older than me when they said I had a lot of free time. They weren't diminishing the academic work I did but I eventually realized that they saw my life in a more objective way and for that I am grateful!”

“The motto of my AmeriCorps was ‘Don't serve, empower.’ I think this really convicted me to stop seeing my service as giving to the less fortunate but rather to see it as an

interaction between God's children in which both take something away from the experience. “

Jim and Lou: The College Servants

“We’ve often served at an extended stay hotel for families of patients at Boston Children's Hospital. We prepare meals for families that come from far away states or even from different countries. They usually spend most of their day at the side of their loved one in the hospital. We have also volunteered at nursing homes serving them, mainly by talking to them and cleaning.”

Jim: “I remember one time at the hospital hotel we were almost done preparing our food and a young couple walked in. They sat down and we began to chat. It turns out that they had just gotten back from the hospital where their infant son had just received emergency heart surgery and they had earlier that day been flown in by emergency from Colorado. They hadn't eaten for most of the day. It was moving just to see how grateful they were to have a meal cooked for them.” (Read Matthew 25: 35-36 I was hungry and thirsty and you gave me something to eat and drink).

“I have served at a local nursing home. As our campus group was about to leave, the facility director pulled us aside and told us how thankful he was for our service because they rarely receive volunteers and very few of the patients get visitors.” (Read James 1:27 – serving widows and orphans, and Matthew 25:36 I was sick and you looked after me.)

“I believe service to others is central to the life as a Christian. Jesus preaches about it innumerable times and even tells us that it is essential to our salvation in passages such as Matthew 25. It is also something that is accessible to everyone. All people of all races, socio-economic statuses, health conditions, personalities and ages have the ability to serve others. I think growing up in a household where God's Word was taught really helped me gain convictions about it. Being part of a church where we call each other to be our best for Christ has helped me as well. I feel God has given me so many opportunities and resources to serve. Even in times where I don't have the means to serve. I always have time. Or when I don't have the time, I always have the means. Most times though I have both. I feel that my most important conviction regarding service is that we must serve out of love. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:3 ‘If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but do not have love, I gain nothing.’”

Lou: “One of the biggest ways I have been involved in serving is through Youth Corps and AmeriCorps programs which I have been a part of for the past four summers. The primary focus of service in most of these experiences has been mentoring and bonding with kids from the inner city. Another opportunity I've had to serve is helping facilitate the prison ministry group that we started this summer. Each week we've been able to go in and talk to the inmates about basic life skills like, self control, listening,

communication and setting goals.” (Read Matthew 25:36 I was in prison and you came to visit me).

“One of the most rewarding experiences I've had through serving is mentoring a kid named Shakure from inner-city Philadelphia. I was able to be his mentor over the course of four years, and through that time I was taught so much about patience, perseverance, and love. Although it took a while to build a relationship and foundation of trust, he has since confided in me and given me back so much of the love that I have shown him. Even at times when it seemed like he didn't care or wouldn't listen, he would later remind me of things I had said or done, and prove how much the things I had said and done really did make a difference to him.”

“Once I was given a taste for what true, wholehearted service looked like on Youth Corps in my early teen years, I have since seen that this aspect of our Christianity is so vital if we want to have the same mind and perspective as Jesus and walk as he did. Being a college student, I have been able to utilize the freedom of time and flexibility of my schedule to explore different avenues of service. Additionally, I have had the great opportunity of having like-minded friends and fellow students to join in my efforts of service and help accomplish more than I possibly could on my own. I think one conviction I have developed is that Jesus did not come to heal the healthy, but the sick, and it is therefore our job to serve those in great spiritual and physical need. In order to do this, it often takes a big step out of our comfort zone, which can be one of the hardest, but also most important things we can do. We should therefore not just serve in ways that are easy or doable, but seek to serve in ways that will meet the greatest needs and follow Jesus' example.”

Charles: The Married Servant

“I directed a community service group that served our town's elderly for more than ten years. I serve regularly at a Food Pantry, have written successful grants that have raised money for many HOPE worldwide programs, and help organize Christmas gift programs for families in need in our church as well as children in foster care.” (Read Romans 12:6-8 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.)

“I once changed the bulbs in the kitchen fluorescent light fixture for an elderly woman. It was not even a ten minute job. Yet the woman was so grateful because she had spent a couple of winter months eating dinner in the dark (or by candle). It showed me that a small kindness can have a significant impact on the quality of someone's life.” (Read Hebrews 2:9 Loving our neighbor involves suffering – Jesus model. What are your little sufferings?)

“The Bible (Luke 12:48) says that from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. I feel that God has given me the blessings of intelligence, ability to write proposals, lead, and to organize. I try to use these God-given gifts to help organize and run benevolence programs for the poor and needy, and write proposals that help fund benevolence programs.”

“I am grateful because I have a great family that supports me when I serve the poor and needy as this means that sometimes I am not around to support them. I have a great job where I accumulate a fair amount of vacation each year. I use much of my vacation to serve every other week at the Food Pantry. I have a great church that provides inspiration in serving the poor and needy and provides lots of opportunities to serve throughout the year.”

“I believe the best way to feel good about yourself (without being prideful) is to help others. No matter how bad a day I may be having, I always feel much better after serving others. Jesus provides my greatest inspiration when he said (Matthew 23:11) that the greatest among us will be our servant. Dr. Martin Luther King has also inspired me by his restatement of this Bible verse when he said that everyone can achieve greatness because everyone can serve others.”

Mary: The Working Mother

“Our family serving together has always been important to my husband and me. When our boys were four and six, we volunteered at the Shattuck Hospital making weekly visits on their geriatric floor. We did this for two years. We visited with the patients and taught them how to play UNO. We have been volunteers with Boston Cares for at least seven plus years, and have done projects from park clean-ups, school painting projects, planting flowers along the Charles River, and the Prison Book ministry. Annually we participate in their MLK day of service in January and many more projects with Boston Cares. Through my teaching job, I have had opportunities to travel to South Africa and Costa Rica and to work with children displaced from their families. (Read Luke 14:33 – sacrifice of our lifestyles.) For a couple years at Halloween, we did a "Trick or Eat" in our neighborhood where we gave our neighbors a brown paper bag with a note stapled to it asking if they would donate non-perishable items for the Framingham Food Pantry, rather than give their children candy.” (Read Matthew 25:35 I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.)

“Opening our home to guests that we have never met, from an orphanage in Rwanda, a township in Soweto, South Africa, and students from Iraq participating in a leadership exchange program is another area of service where our family has learned so much about being selfless, giving, and humble to learn other people's customs and cultures. These times have given us opportunities to share God's love and Word.” (Read Romans 12:13 and Mathew 25:35 – use our homes to help people in need and invite in strangers.)

“One story that will forever stay with me was with our friend Elizabeth who was a patient at the Shattuck Hospital. Elizabeth did not have any family and we enjoyed teaching her how to play UNO and sharing our lives together. After several months, one week we missed our visit on a Tuesday and the hospital called us to let us know that Elizabeth had been ill and had missed seeing us. That Thursday we went for our visit, it was four days before Easter and she had asked her physical therapist to buy some Easter Candy

for our boys, which she gave them at our visit. Elizabeth died that next day and in my heart I felt she was hanging on to see us one more time so she could give the boys the candy and say her good-bye. We asked the hospital to contact us with her funeral arrangements; however, that never happened because she truly had no family - it had become us. This story is one I will never, ever forget about the impact one person or family can make, but I feel Elizabeth was the one who made the deeper impact on our lives.” (Read Philippians 2:3-11 – think of others as being better than you.)

“I pursue service because I believe what I have is from God and is to be shared with others. I don't want to be tied down to ‘things,’ because that's not what life is about. I want my treasure to be in heaven. While on earth if I can share or help someone in need, I pray they will see and know God and his love through what I do. I also know I need help in areas and I have many who give and help me, I can do the same for others through service.” (Read Matthew 6:19-21 – treasures in heaven – where is your heart?)

George: The Family Man

“Over the years I have served in different roles - distributing flyers for disaster preparedness programs, coordinating Thanksgiving dinners for families stricken with AIDS, and overseeing gift collection efforts for underprivileged children for Christmas.”

“Although helping the poor was always in my mind and heart, when I returned to Guatemala (my original home 19 years prior) my heart was broken and I realized I needed to help my family and countrymen of my birth. (Read 1 Timothy 5:8 “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”) To see the poverty was distressing by itself but more so was the realization that I had forgotten what it felt to live in those conditions. Soon after my trip to Guatemala, God guided my life through a path in which I would encounter many new friends that in turn would help me understand and grow in my love for God and his people.” (Read Galatians 6:10 “Do good to all especially the family of believers.”)

“Having been raised in a humble single mom's household and now being blessed with a supportive wife, steady job, and the guidance of spiritual friends makes my serving not only possible but enjoyable. And above all it brings me closer to God.”

“I believe that all, no matter how young, old, rich, or poor, or whatever our life situation might be, we are able to help the needy.”

Conclusion

Disciples are acting on the opportunities God has provided for them as you can see from the examples in this study. God has a plan for you to use your talents, resources, time, and gifts to serve and love others.

Be ready to:

- Respond when an opportunity presents itself.
- Make a conscious decision to be a servant to family, brothers, and sisters in the church as well as people in your daily life as we proclaim the Good News. (Read Luke 5:17-26)

Appendix: Example of Early Christians Helping the Poor & Needy

Overview

Why should the example of early Christians (first 300 years) matter to us? There are several reasons:

- They had closer connection in time to Jesus; some personally knew the apostles or direct disciples of the apostles.
- They tended to take all the teachings of Jesus and the apostles fairly literally, without explaining away the unpopular teachings.
- They saw the Christian faith primarily as a way of life, rather than just holding to a set of beliefs and doctrines.
- They provide inspiring and memorable examples for us in the way they put these teachings into practice. They are an upward call!

Quotes from Early Christians

Source: *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. (Also found in the following collections: *The Pilgrim Road*, *The One Who Knows God* and *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Available through Scroll Publishing.)

Clement (of Alexandria). *“The one who knows God ...is a complete stranger and pilgrim on this earth. He lives in the city but despises the things in the city which others admire. He lives in the city as though he were living in a desert. Through the perfection of love, he impoverishes himself so he will never overlook a brother in need. This is especially so if he knows that he can bear want easier than his brother. He considers pain his own grief. If he suffers any hardship by giving out of his poverty, he does not complain. Rather, he increases his generosity.”*

Clement. (After talking about the love of Christ) *“So now he demands that we give our lives for one another. Therefore, since we have made this mutual agreement with the Savior that we owe our lives to our brothers, why should we hoard our worldly goods any longer? After all they are transitory, worthless and foreign to us. Shall we lock up from each other what will be the property of fire after a little while? John makes a weighty statement when he says, ‘He who does not love his brother is a murderer’. Such a person is the offspring of Cain, a nursling of the devil. He does not have God’s compassion. He has no hope of better things. He is sterile. Barren. His is not a branch of the ever-living heavenly vine. He is cut off, waiting for the perpetual fire.”*

Clement. *“...You should collect for yourself an unarmed, peaceful, bloodless, restrained army: One of pious old men, orphans dear to God, widows armed with meekness, and men adorned with love. Use your money to gather these guards of your body and soul. For their sake, a sinking ship is buoyed, steered by the prayers of the saints alone. Disease at its height is put to flight by the laying on of hands. The attack of robbers is*

spoiled by righteous prayers. And the might of demons is crushed, vanquished by strenuous commands. All of these warriors and guards are trusty. None of them are idle. Not one of them is useless."

Clement. *"Although adopting parrots and curlews, people of the world do not adopt orphan children. Instead, they abandon their young babies born at home, leaving them to die. Yet they adopt the young of birds. So they prefer irrational creatures to those who are rational. Instead, they should take care of the elderly. For the elderly are certainly fairer in mind than pet apes, and they can utter things that are better than what nightingales chirp. Such people should consider the sayings, He that pities the poor lends to the Lord (Read Proverbs 19:17) and 'Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these my brothers, you have done it to me.'" (Read Matthew 25:40)*

Clement. *"Some say, 'I possess, and possess in abundance. Why then should I not enjoy? But that saying is suitable neither to the individual nor to society at large. It is more worthy of love to say, 'I have, so why should I not give to those who need?' I well understand that God has given us the freedom to use our possessions. But this freedom applies only to the extent of what is necessary. And God has determined that we should share what we have. For it is monstrous for one person to live in luxury while many others are in want."*

Hermas. *"Fasting to God in an empty way will do nothing for a righteous life. So instead offer to God a fast of the following kind: Do no evil in your life. Serve the Lord with a pure heart....In addition, you should then do the following: First, having fulfilled all that is written, on the day of your fast taste nothing but bread and water. Then calculate the price of the meals which you intended to eat that day. Then give that amount of money to a widow, or an orphan, or to some person in need."*

Hermas. *"You, then, who serve the Lord, be on watch! Have him in your hearts, that you may do the works of God, remembering his commandments and his promises....So instead of buying lands, buy needy souls, to the extent you are able. Visit widows and orphans and take care not to overlook them. Spend your wealth and all your possessions that you have received from the Lord on such 'lands' and 'houses' as these."*

Cyprian. (He was from a wealthy family in Carthage; gave up his wealth to the poor when he decided to follow Christ) *"With what rewards does the Lord invite us to scorn worldly wealth? With what compensation does he make up for the small and trifling losses we suffer in this present age? He says, 'There is no man that leaves house, land, parents, brothers, wife or children for the kingdom of God's sake but he shall receive a hundredfold even in this life, but in the world to come, live everlasting.' If we know these things – if we have experienced them from the truth of the Lord who promises – we do not fear loss of our material possessions. In fact, we desire their loss."*

"Are you afraid that perhaps your estate will die away if you give generously from it? Don't you know, miserable man, that while you are fearing for your estate, life itself and

salvation are dying away! While you are anxious lest your wealth be diminished, you yourself are being diminished.”

“Divide your profits with the Lord your God. Share your gains with Christ. Make Christ a partner in your earthly possessions, so that he also may make you a fellow-heir with him in his heavenly kingdom.”

“You are an unfair and traitorous father unless you faithfully show concern for your children – that is, unless you plan ahead to help preserve them in religion and true devotion. Otherwise, you are leaving your children in the care of the devil rather than that of Christ. You are sinning doubly when you teach your children to love their property more than Christ.”

“So let us give earthly garments to Christ that we may receive heavenly clothing. Let us give food and drink of this world that we may come with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to the heavenly banquet.”

Justin Martyr. *“The teachings of Jesus have transformed our lives. We who previously delighted in immorality now embrace chastity exclusively...We who valued the acquisition of wealth and possessions above all things now bring what we have into a common pool and share with everyone in need.”*

Mark Felix. *“As he who treads a road is happier the lighter he walks, so happier is he in the journey of life who lifts himself along in poverty and does not breathe heavily under the burden of riches....We would rather scorn riches than to possess them.”*

Conclusion

There are specific ways we find early Christians helping those in need:

- Adopting orphans and abandoned children.
- Taking in the elderly.
- Assisting widows.
- Assisting the sick.
- Feeding the hungry, clothing those without clothing.
- Ransoming those who had been taken captive. Cyprian tells of his church raising 100,000 sesteria, or 80x an average worker’s annual wage (perhaps \$4M today), to ransom other Christians who had been taken captive circa 250 AD by a band of marauding barbarians.
- Burying the abandoned dead.