

## The Poor

### A Biblical Case for Mercy Ministry

*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and the needy.*

Proverbs 31:8-9

*She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.*

Proverbs 31:20

*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.*

Proverbs 3:27

### We had a team in Ukraine....

**One of the marks of the church is care and involvement with the poor. That is how God designed the church.** Now, Jonathan Edwards is only known by most people as the preacher of “Sinners....” He’s not what you might call a “[Liberal humanist](#).” ... “A Christian’s duty to the poor” **“THIS duty is absolutely commanded, and much insisted on, in the Word of God. Where have we any command in the Bible laid down in stronger terms, and in a more absolute urgent manner, than the command of giving to the poor?” – a biblical case**

**Now, I don’t know many people who talk like this.** Many Christians view care and involvement with the poor as **optional**. It is viewed as **a department in the church**. It is a committee. However, missions, which is the call to the unreached and the poor, is not optional. It is what we do as Christians. **Our founder was a missionary, who went out doing good in word and deed.** But here is Edwards, “there is nothing more clear, mentioned more often, mentioned more strongly, there’s nothing more incapable of refusal.”

Now, this in the past three years or so has been a revolution for me. **The Gospel, if you understand it, transforms not only your heart and eternity, but it transforms how you see the world.** And in turn compels us to love those in need. **Paul said, “the love of Christ controls us.”**

## I. Knowing the Poor: Our Problem

- An estimated 963 million people in the world go hungry (U.N.).
- Every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes -- one child every five seconds.
- In 2006, about 9.7 million children died before they reached their fifth birthday.
- The U.N. Development Program estimates that the basic health and nutrition needs of the world's poorest people could be met for an additional \$13 billion a year. Animal lovers in the United States and Europe spend more than that on pet food each year. (<http://www.bread.org/>).
- Human trafficking is the world’s third largest criminal enterprise, after drugs and weapons (U.S. Department of State).
- Worldwide, there are nearly two million children in the commercial sex trade (UNICEF). There are an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 children, women and men trafficked across international borders annually. (U.S.D.S.)
- Approximately 80 percent of human trafficking victims are women and girls, and up to 50 percent are minors. (U.S.D.S.) The total market value of illicit human trafficking is estimated to be in excess of \$32 billion. (U.N.) Sex trafficking is an engine of the global AIDS epidemic. (U.S.D.S.) – See also [www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org)

- **If your child were included in these statistics, where would you expect help to come from?**
- **What would give you hope?**
- **Would you expect people from around the world to come to your family’s aid? Why or why not?**
- **Why do you think that people hear statistics like this, are broken over hearing these things, yet still never do anything in response? ([Hotel Rwanda](#), “aren’t the American’s watching, yes, they watch the evening news, and say, “how sad” and turn the TV off)**
- **An Economic Situation: [Poverty \(31:20\)](#)**

Proverbs (and the Bible) rebukes those who become poor due to their own *sin* (sluggard, crime). But Scripture recognizes that poverty can result from injustice, oppression, or exploitation, and may lead to a variety of problems in which case God’s people must show mercy and justice. One of the results of the fall is poverty and abuse.

The lady in Proverbs 31, is opening her hands in help.

“A rich man’s wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin” (10:15). To be poor is to be a city without walls. They live insecurely. They are thrown away.

Isn’t it because they won’t work? No. It’s not that simple. **80-90%** of the poor of the references is not about how they were once wealthy, but squandered it; or that they were unwilling to work.

The poor are under our nose... “Nicked and Dimed”

She talks about people struggling, living in cars...

“Myths and Facts about the Homeless” (National Coalition of the Homeless), **nearly 1/5 of the homeless in 29 cities surveyed, are employed in full or part time work.**

- **A Social Condition: Oppressed**
- “The ground of the poor would yield much food, but injustice sweeps it away” (13:23). **What they have is taken away. This is how you see who the poor are. They are stripped, oppressed, taken from but not given.**
- *The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.* (Prov. 22:2)
- *Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate.* (Prov. 22:22)
- *Like a roaring lion or charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people* (Prov. 28:15). *A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor* (28:16a).
- This mindless tyranny is wicked. It is sub-human. But like Neb., they will pay.
- With poverty comes a lack of power. They have no voice. The greatest example of this, and saddest example is that of children.

*There are those whose teeth are swords whose fangs are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mankind* (Prov. 30:14).

*“Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.”* (Prov. 17:5)

- **A Physical Condition: The Poor Are Hurting (Matt. 25:35)**

**This is a seen of judgment.... Jesus says there will be some surprises... true faith will result in compassionate works.**

One of the questions you will not here on the final day is “**Did you get a good tan?**” The myriad of things people get excited about today, these passing pleasures, will seem so stupid.

- Hungry/Thirsty – hunger pains
- Stranger – Hurting emotionally (internationals)
- Naked – Hurting from Shamed, abused,
- Sick – dying from diseases (many preventable)
- Prison – we have some guys who do this..

- **A Spiritual Condition: The Poor Are Hopeless (Isa. 61:1-3)**

- Notice what the promised Messiah will do...“good news”
- **Turn to Psalm 146** (ask Nick to come forward)

Piper: Half of the least developed countries are also the least evangelized countries. The other half have very few Christians. One study of poverty and spiritual need expressed this observation: *The most dominant impression one gains from looking at the world in this way is that the poor are the lost and the lost are the poor. Whether one approaches the data from a desire to learn where the Good News needs to be heard, or a desire to find the poorest of the poor, the answer is the same.* The lost are the poor and the poor are the lost.

**Nick:** 1) Where did you serve? Do these four groups summarize the people you worked with? How so? 2) What did you struggle with the most? 3) What are some of the lessons that you would want to share with the church?

## II. Loving the Poor: Our Responsibility

- We must show **generosity** for those in need

*Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor (Prov. 14:21).*

“I shovel money out, and God shovels it back... but God has a bigger shovel”

*Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord (Prov. 19:17).*

**Galatians 2:10** – “remember the poor” – Agreed on the Gospel, and they agreed on concern for the poor.

(1) It was important enough to mention it along side of the purity of the Gospel. They agreed on financial support be given to the poor. Not: church polity, buildings, committees, music styles,

(2) Paul was “eager to do it.” It was a blessing to give to the poor.

- **Social Gospel? Nice excuse.**
- **To whom much is given, much is required.**
- **If you make more than 1,500 per year you are richer than 75% of the world’s 6 billion people. (I realized this was not far-fetched in Ukraine).**
- **The most humbling thing for me is budget time. ....I pray that Temple will one day not be known by the size of its building, but by the size of its giving ....**
- **But it’s not just money, we must give... When God chose to save us, he did not send a check... he came personally**

**Proverbs 31:** Notice “she opens her hands *and reaches out her hands to the needy*”... care “until their need is gone” on their feet

“Joanna, Susanna and others supported Jesus and the disciples” (Luke 8:3); “A woman poured an alabaster jar of perfume, a year’s worth of wages, on Jesus’ head” (Mark 14:3); Tabitha, “always doing good and helping the poor.” (Acts 9:36)

- We must act **justly** to those who are *oppressed*.

*A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not know such knowledge. (Prov. 29:7)*

“knowledge refers to a deep level of concern, it is a richer word in Hebrew....” He is concerned for the poor, the fatherless, the widow, the blind; he fights against injustice.

Examples abound for this... **Look at Job 29:11-17.**

**Job is recounting his righteous deeds as a young man, notice what they include:** (1) the poor (v. 12a); (2) the fatherless (v. 12b); (3) widow’s song (v. 13b) – what a picture; (4) justice (v. 14); (5) lame (v. 15); (6) father to the needy (v. 16, James “visit”); (7) Justice (v. 17)

**Matt. 23** - Jesus said that the Pharisees were willing to pull out the smallest of insects and yet swallow a whole camel.

- **You are concerned with minuta... Micah 6:8.** Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God....**Isaiah 1:15-17**
- **Listen, loved ones, Conservative evangelicalism does not have a good track record with mercy; they have a track records with popularity and image. This burdens me.**
- **People can give you the name of ten speakers, go to conference after conference, have tons of songs on their i-pod and can’t tell you ten orphans, ten poor people they’ve given to, ten churches that they are praying for in urban cities – eating the camel. Hypocrisy. Clean outside, rotten inside. View the faith only externally, you have no depth.**
- **Can I tell you what is on Jesus’ list? Mercy. Justice. Faithfulness. HE is not impressed by public displays he is glorified by personal obedience. I’m afraid contemporary churches in America measure success differently than Jesus.**

- We must **care** for those who are *hurting*. (Acts 3:1-10)

This man is outside the entrance of the Sanctuary, in order to get into the sanctuary you about had to trip over this guy. People were thinking “That is OK, I’m going to get my worship on.” He will be alright.

- **See** the needs (3)
- **Feel** the needs (4)
- **Touch** the needs (7)

My wife giving massages and taking pictures of the ladies and the women’s shelter. Jesus touched the leper. He took Jarius’ daughter by the hand.

*Who can you care for this week?*

**Application: What made the early church different? Their concern for people....**

Look at verse 41 – 3,000 people. They preach to the masses. Here, they are caring for one guy.

**Truth: Those who are effective at reaching the many are those who are concerned about reaching the one.**

**Application:** I have seen guys that wouldn’t do anything to help out an individual, but when you get them around their spiritual peers or the masses they will flex the muscle. They go from like Peewee Herman to Vin Diesel.

In 252, a plague hit Carthage, people were leaving the city for the threat of contamination and losing everything. Cyprian, drew all the Christian leaders together in the middle of the town and said that if we are going to live like Jesus, then “I call you to fan out through this town to give to all according to their need” – even if they are not Christians. And they would not abandon the city in the midst of the plague. **Later**, one of the Roman Emperor Julian hated Christianity and revive the pagan religion, he said “**their success lies in their charity to all. They take care of the poor not only their own.**”

- We must share the **Gospel** to those who are *hopeless*. (Matt. 9:35-38; 10:7-8)

**Do not believe the lie that you must choose between evangelism and mercy ministry. Jesus did them both! He reduced temporary suffering and eternal suffering. And he often did the two together.**

- See Matt. 4:23; 9:35
- “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and affliction (9:35)

Anyone who is a follower of Jesus Christ must be just as concerned as he was about those in need. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” (36)

- Jesus saw the crowds and was broken....**Many are not even inconvenienced by the numbers – because they are not only poor, they are powerless – you don’t have to have anything to do them – you can comfortably ignore them in our affluence and not even think about them.**
- **They do exist!**
- God measures the **integrity of our faith by our concern for the poor** – I’ve journeyed through the Bible. Over 2,000 times in Scripture. In Isaiah he said, “you make your sacrifices and have your rituals, but deny the poor” – **it is repulsive to me.**

**Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered (Prov. 21:13).**

**My prayer for young people – God would raise them up right now... they love dolls, but I pray it will turn to compassion for babies with no mommies, love guns, trucks, balls, turn into passion for fighting for justice, passion for truth. Don’t waste your life. Make it count for eternity.**

### III. Identifying with the Poor: Our Need

Care for the poor will not happen, as it should, until we understand that:

- We are all made in God's **image**.

*The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the maker of them all. (Prov. 22:2)*

*The poor man and the oppressor meet together; the LORD gives light to the eyes of both. (Prov. 29:13)*

Ghandi, "if Christians have cast differences, I should remain Hindu"

- We are all in spiritual **poverty**.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit for they shall see God. (Matt. 5:3)*  
**Not middle class in spirit, not those who say "I can do it." The Gospel only comes to those who say I have no power and I must rely on the sheer grace of Jesus.**

**The Gospel says your good deeds are not good, they were done with wrong motivations; they are as a filthy rag; there's one hope:**

**Jesus Christ, the suffering servant the rich one, became poor, born in a manger, his parents could only afford the two young pigeons, he was a homeless man, rejected, cast off, weeping, riding a borrowed donkey, borrowed room, borrowed tomb, and dies naked without nothing – only because he did this, can we be saved.**

***"Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless look to thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die."***

**We come to Christ the same way a kid in poverty from India comes. **Stephen****

- We all desperately need the **Messiah**. (Luke 4:17-21)

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."**

The prophets understand that the problem is bigger than if the wealthy will start helping the poor; we need a Messiah. He is promised, and Jesus came and he preached the shortest most powerful sermon recorded.

At his first coming, the Messiah gave us the **example** and the instruction for caring for the poor (Luke 4:17-22). He then went to the cross and died for those who oppress, and don't love; he became the sinner that we might be saved.

At his second coming, the Messiah will correct all **injustice**, **heal** all diseases, provide for everyone, and establish the world we've always longed for – for those who were willing to admit their spiritual poverty before Him and trust him as their only hope.