

# HELPING WITHOUT HURTING

Ministry Training and Equipping Seminar

# Introduction

- A low-income, inner-city home gets a visit from a wealthier family from the suburbs bringing Christmas gifts for the children.
- ▣ Though at first glance this seems like a wonderful experience, it may actually be doing damage to both families.

# Introduction

- “But after organizing these kinds of Christmas charity events for years, I was witnessing a side I had never noticed before: how a father is emasculated in his own home in front of his wife and children for not being able to provide presents for his family, how a wife is forced to shield her children from their father’s embarrassment, how children get the message that the “good stuff” comes from rich people out there and it is free...Doing *for* rather than doing *with* those in need is the norm. Add to it the combination of patronizing pity and unintended superiority, and charity becomes toxic” (Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, p. 33, 35)

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- Wealth is a good thing
  - In Psalm 1:3 and 112:3, wealth and prosperity are marks of those who fear God and delight in His law.
    - “He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”
    - “Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!...Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.”
  - Material prosperity is a blessing that comes from God (Gen 24:35; Dt 8:18).
    - “You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth”

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- Poverty is a bad thing
- Sometimes, a person's poverty arises primarily from his own sins, including laziness, love of sleep, and wasted spending on pleasure (Prov 12:24; 14:23; 19:15; 20:13; 21:17; 24:30–34).
  - “The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor.” (Prov 12:24)
  - “In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.” (Prov 14:23)
  - “Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.” (Prov 19:15)
  - “Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.” (Prov 20:13)
  - “Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.” (Prov 21:17)

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- Other times, a person's poverty is a result of the sins of others, including the sins of injustice and exploitation (Prov 13:23; 22:22; Is 10:1–2; Jer 22:13; Ezek 22:29; Amos 2:6; 5:11, 12; 8:4–6; Mic 2:2).
  - “The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.” (Prov 13:23)
  - “Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate,” (Prov 22:22)
  - “The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice.” (Eze 22:29).

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- ▣ “Therefore because you trample on the poor you exact taxes of grain from him...you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.”  
(Amos 5:11, 12)
- ▣ As well, some people are in poverty as a result of natural disasters that occur in a sin-cursed world (Gen 47).

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- Wealth is a negative thing
  - It draws people away from God (Dt 8:10–17).
    - “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, <sup>12</sup> lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” (Dt 8:11-14)

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- Wealth is dangerous because the “deceitfulness of riches” can keep people from salvation (Mt 13:22).
  - “As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- Poor are righteous
  - There are times in which it almost seems that the poor person is equated with the righteous person who is on God's side (Ps 9:18; 10:14; 12:5; 14:5–6; 34:6; 35:10; 74:19).
    - “Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD? <sup>5</sup> There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. <sup>6</sup> You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge.” (Ps 14:4-6).

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- Why does this happen? Those who are materially poor are often more likely to recognize their spiritual poverty and thus turn to God for help (James 2:5).
  - “Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?”

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- “As God is specially concerned about the poor, so the poor may be specially concerned about God, for two good reasons. If there is poverty in Israel, it is because those with power are misusing it; so the poor will claim God’s help first because it is his rule which is being flouted, and he must vindicate himself, and secondly, because in the circumstances there is no one else to turn to. In this way “poor” becomes almost a technical term. “The poor” are the humble, and the humble are the godly (Ps 10:17; 14:5, 6; 37:11; Zep 3:12, 13). Just as being rich can foster self-indulgence, self-confidence, pride, and the despising and oppression of one’s fellows, so being poor should encourage the opposite virtues.” (*Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 1732.)

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- So, while the Bible teaches that wealth is a gift from God, it does not teach that all believers will be wealthy.
- Neither does it teach that poverty necessarily guarantees spirituality.
- In reality, “the morality of riches depends entirely on personal attitudes.” (*Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 1859.)

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- How does this relate to the Christian's ministry to the poor?
  - ▣ 1) It helps us to realize that the answer to poverty is not merely increasing wealth, since a love for wealth brings horrible consequences.
  - ▣ 2) It helps us to see how we should view our own material goods—not as things we have acquired but as gifts from God to be used to serve Him.
  - ▣ 3) It helps us to recognize that poverty is the result of sin, but not necessarily the direct result of an individual's sin.

# Biblical Perspective of Poverty and Wealth

- This is an important issue to recognize, since the causes of poverty must be considered if a proper remedy is to be provided.
- Too often, conservatives tend to see the poor as having created their own problems and, thus, are the ones to share the bulk of the blame for their predicament.
- Liberals tend to emphasize societal causes, and, thus, view the poor as merely victims of circumstances outside of their control.
- Most often, poverty is caused by a combination of both individual and societal/structural/cultural causes.
- For example, a young man may grow up in a poor neighborhood and attend a school that does not provide a quality education. After graduating, he is still basically illiterate and as a result cannot find a job. Eventually, his frustration leads him to alcoholism and he becomes a homeless drunkard. Why is he poor—unfair systems, sinful choices, or both?

# Helping Without Hurting

- *Indiscriminate Charity?*
  - Are we supposed to give to any person who comes and asks for money? What about those people who have wasted their money or are not willing to get a job?
  - Paul teaches very clearly that believers should work to provide for themselves. Those who are unwilling to work should not be supported by other believers. Instead, they should be put out of fellowship to push them to repentance (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thes 3:6–15; cf. Eph 4:28).
  - How this applies to unbelievers is uncertain. It would seem, though, as a general rule that we should not provide the needs for unbelievers who have the capability of providing for themselves.

# Helping Without Hurting

- *Ministry to Believers or Unbelievers?*
  - Are believers supposed to minister to all poor people, or only to poor Christians? Is there a priority of one over the other?
  - Most of the passages in the New Testament are speaking of believers helping other believers (e.g., John 13:35; Acts 2:45; 11:27–30; Gal 6:1–2; James 2:14–16; 1 Jn 3:16–17).
  - However, Scripture is clear that believers are also to minister to those who are unbelievers, including their enemies (Lk 6:32–36; Lk 10:25–37; Matt 5:45.)
  - Galatians 6:10 helps us to see the relationship between the two: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

# Helping Without Hurting

- *How Do We Help Without Creating Dependency?*
  - Too often those who give to the poor actually cause damage, perhaps most often by creating unnecessary dependency among those receiving the aid.

# Helping Without Hurting

- To try to avoid this issue, one must determine what category of assistance is needed—relief, rehabilitation, or development.
  - 1) Relief is “the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis.”
  - 2) Rehabilitation “seeks to restore people and their communities to the positive elements of their pre-crisis conditions.”
  - 3) Development is “the process of ongoing change that moves all people involved—both the ‘helpers’ and the ‘helped’—closer to being in a right relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation.” (Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself*, p. 104.)

# Helping Without Hurting

- It is necessary to determine which type of help is required for a given situation. Providing relief when development is needed will do more harm than good.
  - “Relief should be seldom, immediate, and temporary”  
(*When Helping Hurts*, pp. 109–110.)
- If our ministry to the poor is to be effective, we must think through how to evaluate the needs and work to accomplish actual benefit for those in need.

# Helping Without Hurting

- (1) “Never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.”
- (2) “Limit one-way giving to emergency situations.”
- (3) “Strive to empower the poor through employment, lending, investing, using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements”
- (4) “Subordinate self-interests to the needs of those being served.”
- (5) “Listen closely to those you seek to help, especially to what is not being said—unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to effective service.”
- (6) “Above all, do no harm.” (Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, pp. 8–9).