



God's law was intended for good. Folks with the contagious disease of leprosy, lived apart for the mutual safety of society, cooperatively yelling "Unclean" as one approached, out of concern. In sympathy for their suffering brethren, the community cared for them—providing for them as their need was formidable.

As folks would get good at keeping law, definitions changed. Leprosy became, any skin disease, later including *"anyone who does not contribute to positively to society,"* creating new outcasts—new lepers.

People of poverty were believed to have "earned" their stature in life, as did those who were sick, mentally ill, the sin sick, and the unlovable—an inability to keep the law earned them these things, because they were sinners deserving of what they got.

Poverty: is not having what you need!

There is much talk about one's worthiness to receive goods and services, wither in the Church or the secular world. We call it "good stewardship" today. After all, we don't want to waist God's provision. However, *not having what you need* will look very different from culture-to-culture. Poverty in a rainforest is very different than poverty in a modern city. Those in the rainforest might *need* a good bow, sling or dart. Clothing is minimal, and food is free. In a city, where to eat, you need money, preferably through employment, but to get a job you need an address, and descent clothing (at least a phone number to receive a interview callback), you can see that poverty—*Not Having What You Need*—can look very different. ***Following God, is following Christ in his work of reconciliation and provision.***

God's Heart for the Poor

When you think of poverty, what image stands out in your mind?
(You may include personal experiences, scenes from the news, or the first picture that pops into your mind.)

Scripture is full of references to God's concern for those who are impoverished, vulnerable, and oppressed. ***One researcher once***

cut out, with scissors, every verse pertaining to God's heart for the poor...and ended up with a very holey Bible indeed. He learned that God's concern for the poor—and His desire that we share in that compassion—is recorded hundreds of times in His word.

Our short discussion will hopefully shed light on God's perspective on poverty. As we consider the Scriptures, may we discover God's mandate to ***"do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."*** (Micah 6:8)

Introduction

Important to consider what God's Word says first, isn't it? Today we're going to look at the Bible's perspective on poverty.

Crucial Words to the Discussion

Poverty, Foreigner, Leper, Justice, Mercy, & Worship
Did you know that Scripture ***mentions poverty and injustice more than any other issue?*** Yet how many of us have spent time ***really considering the plight of the poor through God's eyes?***

How sincere is God?

nearly 3000 biblical references to caring for the poor, including;

- ✠ **The Law**
- ✠ **Prophets**
- ✠ **Poetry**
- ✠ **Wisdom**
- ✠ **Jesus, &**
- ✠ **the Early Church**

As we read these verses, look for words and phrases that speak about God's heart and actions towards the poor.

14 You have seen it; for your eyes are on sorrow and grief, to take it into your hand: the poor man puts his faith in you; you have been the helper of the child who has no father. 15 Let the arm of the sinner and the evil-doer be broken; go on searching for his sin till there is no more. 16 The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations are gone from his land. 17 Lord, you have given ear to the prayer of the poor: you will make strong their hearts, you will give them a hearing: 18 To give decision for the

child without a father and for the broken-hearted, so that the man of the earth may no longer be feared. Psalm 10.14-18

12 For he will be a savior to the poor in answer to his cry; and to him who is in need, without a helper. 13 He will have pity on the poor, and be the savior of those who are in need. 14 He will keep their souls free from evil designs and violent attacks; and their blood will be of value in his eyes. Psalm 72.12-14

49 Truly, this was the sin of your sister Sodom: pride, a full measure of food, and the comforts of wealth in peace, were seen in her and her daughters, and she gave no help to the poor or to those in need. 50 They were full of pride and did what was disgusting to me: and so I took them away as you have seen. Eze 16.49-50

He who is hard on the poor puts shame on his Maker; but he who has mercy on those who are in need gives him honor. Proverbs 14.31

He who has pity on the poor gives to the Lord, and the Lord will give him his reward. Proverbs 19.17

What kind of repayment do you think God gives to those who help the poor?

According to **Jeremiah 22.16** defending the cause of the poor is what it mean to know God.

What does **Isaiah 1.10-20** teach us about the relationship between caring for the poor and worship?

Imitating God's compassion for the poor is an essential, mandatory part of our Christian lives.

God commands us to care for the poor, offering blessings for obedience and consequences for disobedience. Discuss the specific commands God gives us regarding the poor? **James 1.27, 2.14-17; Deuteronomy 15.7-11; Proverbs 31.8-9**

How does **God bless those who help the poor?**

What are the consequences of not helping the poor? **Proverbs 21.13; 22.9; 28.27; Isaiah 58.1-11**

Consider Luke 4.16-21 ala, Isaiah 61

“Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.” (Mother Teresa)

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

When someone oppresses the poor, whom is he hurting?

God uniquely identifies Himself with the poor and intimately ties our worship of Him with caring for the poor.

Movie: *Lifesaving Station*

Conclusion and Application

How should Christians be living in relation to the poor?

If you had to summarize God's heart for the poor in one sentence, what would you say?

What changes might God want from you in your life today?

Who in this picture represents Christ? Which one represents the Church? Careful now.



Jesus walked his earthly ministry among very religious people. They argued a lot about religious doctrine and divided over major and minor points. However, they shared agreement over one thing, regardless of their disunity... They all neglected the poor — “the Least.”

Jesus had very sharp words for them. He modeled a kingdom that was very different, where the least were put first, and became the instruments to guide the religious back to God's heart.



Key Scripture Passages – God’s Heart for the Poor

God’s heart for the poor

Psalm 10:14-18

Psalm 72:12-14

Psalm 146

Luke 4:16-21

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Proverbs 14:31

Matthew 25:31-46

Proverbs 19:17

Jeremiah 22:13-17

Isaiah 1:10-17

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James 1:27

James 2:14-17

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

Proverbs 31:8-9

Proverbs 21:13

Proverbs 22:9

Proverbs 28:27

Isaiah 58:1-11

Discussion Questions

1. How many references indicate that the poor are poor because they deserve it? How many indicate otherwise?
2. How does God feel about the poor?
3. What kinds of measures does God take to ensure the poor are cared for?
4. Discover the context of the passage “You will always have the poor with you...” (Matt. 26:11) When Jesus quotes it, what does he have in mind?
5. What factors does the Bible point to as the causes of the kind of poverty over which the poor have no control?
6. What part did the poor play in Jesus’ mission?
7. Describe the relationship between God and a person who takes no interest in the poor.
8. What forms does modern oppression of the poor take?
9. In light of world hunger, how are we to make sense of Bible verses like Psalm 145:14-16, “*The LORD upholds all who fall, And raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing*” (NKJV)?
10. Can people oppress the poor unintentionally? Why or why not?

Practical Advice:

- ✓ Assess Local Needs
- ✓ No Substitute for Personal Involvement
(When asked, be ready...)
- ✓ Escape the Idea of Conquest
(this will look much different than “programs” oriented ministry)
- ✓ Funding & Church Consumerism
vs Philanthropy
- ✓ Prepare for Controversy
- ✓ Best done *TOGETHER* with Other Local
Congregations
- ✓ Blessing Your Cesar