

A close-up photograph of a person's hands, one holding the other, with text overlaid. The hands are positioned in a way that suggests support or care. The background is dark and out of focus.

# What Does the Bible Teach About the Problem of Poverty?

**Mark 14:7 - “For you have the poor  
with you always, and whenever you  
wish you may do them good...”**

## James 1:26-27

- “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”



## Three Qualifications That Make One's Religion Acceptable To God:

- It must affect the way we treat other people
- It must affect the way we treat the helpless
- It must affect the way we live before others
- God expects us to be like Him
  - Psalm 68:5 - “A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation.”

# The Poor

- The phrase “poor and needy” occurs 17 times in scripture
- The poor are in the first sentence of the first sermon of Jesus at the beginning of His ministry - Matt. 5:3
- Obviously, God cares about them, and expects His children to care for them as well
- There will always be poor persons in our communities
  - John 12:8 - ““For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always”



# Poverty Is An Urgent Problem In The World Today

- Poverty is a relative term. Some feel poor because others are much richer.
- 99% of Americans are rich by world standards.
- The combined income of 41 of the poorest countries in the world is less than the income of the poorest state in the US
- The official poverty line in America is \$26,200 for family of four per year

# Poverty Is An Urgent Problem In The World Today

- 76% of the poor in the US have a car; 1% of the poor in the rest of the world own a car. 96% have a television; 58% have a computer
- 81% of the poor in the US have a phone; 15% of the people in the rest of the world have phones
- The average American makes \$145 per day; 80% of the rest of the world lives on less than \$13 per day; in Africa, the average person lives on 57¢ per day



# Poverty Is An Urgent Problem In The World Today

- Hunger is a major problem in the world today. 34,000 children and 16,000 adults starve to death every day.
- Americans spend \$60 billion per year on weight loss products. 71% of Americans are overweight with 38% of them considered obese. We don't know poverty and hunger in this country



# Helping The Poor Is A Faith Issue

- Our attitude toward the poor is directly related to our relationship with God.
- What one does for the poor glorifies God
  - Prov. 14:31 - “He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.”



# Helping The Poor Is A Faith Issue

- What one does for the poor blesses more than the poor; it encourages onlookers and makes him fulfilled
  - Psalm 41:1 - “Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble”
  - Acts 20:35 - “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’”
  - Luke 6:38 - “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

# Helping The Poor Is A Faith Issue

- One's faith is measured by how he treats those in need
  - James 2:15-17 - “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”
- Faith motivates one's heart to put his body into action
  - James 1:22 - “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”

# Helping The Poor Is A Faith Issue

- God has always commanded His people to care for the poor.
  - Deut. 15:11 - “For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land’”
  - Psalm 82:3-4 - “Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy. 4 Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked”

# Helping The Poor Is A Faith Issue

- Jesus instructed “the just” to give preference to the poor
  - Luke 14:13-14 - “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”
- The apostles commanded it as essential to salvation
  - 1John 3:17-18 - “But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

# Helping The Poor Is A Faith Issue

- The New Testament church cared for the poor from the beginning
  - Acts 2:44-45, 4:32 - From the Day of Pentecost
  - Act 6:1-6 - Deacons were ordained to care for needy widows
  - 1Tim 5:3-16 - Timothy was commanded to preach the care of widows
  - 2Cor. 8:1-15 - It is the responsibility of churches to relieve needy Christians
  - James 1:27 - It is the responsibility of individual Christians





# Helping The Poor Is A Faith Issue

- In reality, one gets more spiritually from helping the poor than they receive materially from him
  - James 1:9-10 - “Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.”



A pair of worn, dark-colored sneakers is shown on a dark surface. The shoes are positioned in the lower half of the frame, with one shoe slightly ahead of the other. The background is dark and textured, possibly a concrete floor. The overall tone is somber and gritty.

# Helping The Poor Requires That One Overcome Prejudices

- “Poor people choose to be poor”
- “Poor people are lazy and don’t want to work”
- “In America, no one is really poor”
- “It's the government's responsibility to care for the poor”
- “I don't have anything to give”
- “I don't want to”

# Helping The Poor Has Always Been Difficult

- “Great experience is required to distinguish between those who are really poor and those who beg only that they may collect money. He who gives to a distressed and sick person gives to God, and will receive a reward. But he who gives to a vagabond and parasite...gives it to men who deserve contempt for their audacity, rather than pity for their poverty.” (Bishop Basil, 4th Century)

# Helping The Poor Has Always Been Difficult

- “Deacons rendered as great an individualizing effort as is possible in the relief of the poor. Every one received the assistance that his necessities required. Efforts were, above all, made to render the poor again capable of work, and put them in a condition to earn their own livelihood. They were directed where to find work, and were furnished with tools.” (“Christian Charity in the Ancient Church” by Gerhard Uhlhorn)



# Helping The Poor Has Always Been Difficult

- To help the poor, one must know the poor
  - The oppressed poor
  - The uninformed poor
  - The disabled poor
  - The circumstantial poor
  - The lazy poor
  - The prodigal poor

# Helping The Poor Takes Commitment

- There are at least three ways we help the poor. All take commitment, money, work, and time
  - Relief - Urgent and temporary aid in response to disasters.
  - Restoration - Longer term response to permanently correct a grave problem; return people who experienced a crisis back to pre-crisis state
  - Rehabilitation - This requires a lot of time and many tough decisions, but at some point, rehabilitation must replace relief and restoration.





# Helping The Poor Takes Commitment

- The poor who bear responsibility for their condition must ask themselves and honestly answer some very tough questions
  - Have you changed the choices or behaviors that created the crisis?
  - Do you want to be self-sufficient; and if so, how much are you willing to do to become self-sufficient?



# Helping The Poor Takes Commitment

- Those who help the poor who are responsible for their condition must be careful not to sin with their help
  - Help them with humility and love; never be judgmental, whether in relief, restoration, or rehabilitation
  - Teach them a Biblical perspective of work and stewardship. Teach them on how to find a job. Coach them on keeping their job
  - Understand that in the case of persons who are responsible for their poverty, continual relief will hinder their restoration and rehabilitation

# Remember The Poor

- Caring for the poor is not the job of the government. It is a command of God for the church in limited benevolence; for individuals on an opportunity basis.
- Preachers are commanded to teach it to Christians - Titus 3:14
- We are blessed, and with blessing comes responsibility - 2Cor. 8:13-14
- Those who remember the poor glorify God - Prov. 14:31

# Remember The Poor

- By all accounts, the early church was a haven for the poor, the enslaved, and the dispossessed - James 2:1-9
- Somewhere along the way, we've changed the nature of the church as a refuge for people weary of the burdens of this life into a social club for people who have all of the right connections.
- “The contemporary church has become this kind of place where the runaway slave Onesimus would not feel welcome long enough to hear the gospel and where the first century Pharisee might feel right at home.” (McClaren)
- Are we eager to help the poor, or will we just stay sequestered away in our own comfortable lives?