

God's Concern for the Poor: A Study for International Students

Session 1: Jesus' Ethical Foundation

Introduction

At the end of the second century, when the Church was in its infancy, an intellectual named Celsus sought to discredit the followers of Jesus because of His primary appeal was with the uneducated and poor: "Their aim is to convince only worthless and contemptible people, idiots, slaves, poor women and children ... They would not dare to address an audience of intelligent men ... But if they see a group of young people or slaves or rough folk, there they push themselves in and seek to win the admiration of the crowd."¹

Celsus correctly observed that the early Church aggressively and disproportionately sought to share the Good News of Jesus with the marginalized, and with great results. His assertion was that Christianity lacked credibility because it was not targeted to the rich, powerful, and elite in society.

This prejudice carries through to this day, where the conventional wisdom is to seek favor with celebrities having significant influence in government or entertainment. But the life and teachings of Jesus reveal a different set of assumptions. In fact, Jesus and His followers understood that in His Kingdom, the poor and oppressed were the primary means by which He would spread His rule around the world and throughout history.

Discussion: What are your thoughts about Celsus' critique of early Christians? Should value be measured by its effectiveness among the rich and powerful? If something is effective among the poor and oppressed, should that be viewed as of lesser value?

Who are the Poor?

Typically, the word "poor" is understood to mean "not having enough money." While this is certainly part of the definition, a broader Biblical understanding of the poor has more to do with powerlessness and vulnerability than it does with money. Therefore, the poor are: *Those who are so powerless and dependent that they are vulnerable to being misused by those who have influence on society.*²

In other words, the poor are those who are on the wrong end of a relationship with those in power. This results in three characteristics: 1) they lack the resources they need;

2) they are taken advantage of by those who have resources; 3) they must humbly turn to God as their source of help.

Robert Guelich said it this way: “The accent falls on a socioeconomic relationship rather than on material possessions as such. Yet this powerless and dependent relationship causes them to rely upon God for one’s needs and vindication. This humble posture of the poor, devoid of pretension before God, reflects the religious dimension and comes out frequently the Psalms.”³

This dual understanding of the poor (socioeconomic powerlessness and religious dependence) provides the understanding for the rest of Biblical teaching about the poor. In all accounts, the point is the same: *the poor are those who are desperate enough to rely on God alone*. As a result, those who are willing to acknowledge their complete helplessness are best poised to receive help from God.

If the proper understanding of poor is to be *desperate enough to rely on God alone*, several conclusions can be made, both for those who are socioeconomically powerful (rich and elite) and for those who are socioeconomically deficient (vulnerable and at-risk):

The powerful are:

- Still able to trust in God alone, despite their wealth and influence, but such people are rare because they tend to fall back to using power to help them through life.
- Difficult to evangelize and disciple because they are not desperate enough to repent and receive help from God.
- Continually tempted to use their power to take advantage of the less powerful.
- Tempted by fear of losing their money or power, leading to greed, hoarding, and oppressing the poor.

Those lacking power are:

- Still able to refuse to trust in God and depend on themselves for deliverance; lacking money and power does not always result in reliance on God.
- More open to the Good News because their daily experience reminds them of their need for help.
- More sympathetic to the plight of others because of their daily experience of vulnerability at the hands of the powerful.
- Tempted by schemes to quickly escape their problems such as winning the lottery or stealing, rather than trusting God.

Whether a person has socioeconomic power or not, everyone is susceptible to believing, “I don’t need God.” However, between the two, the powerful are in a more precarious

position because they can function without depending on God for their daily needs. However, the powerless are constantly reminded of their need for God.

Discussion:

1. **What do you think about this definition of the poor: “Those who are so powerless and dependent that they are vulnerable to being misused by those who have influence on society?”**
2. **In comparing the list of conclusions about the powerful versus those lacking power, which one is most instructive to you and why?**

Jesus’ Foundation

Jesus’ teachings are built on the foundation of the Hebrew Scriptures, or what is also called the “Old Testament.” God’s intent was to establish a nation oriented to God’s character, a culture into which Jesus the Messiah would be born and raised. In order for Jesus to launch His worldwide ministry, God first chose to people of Israel as a foundation on which Jesus and His disciples would build.

By His sovereign grace God delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and brought them into a land that He had promised to their ancestor Abraham. After their rescue from oppression, He gave them instructions about how to set up a civil society, guidance which was in stark contrast to the other ancient cultures of the day. It is important to remember that this Law was given as a gift to Israel after they were saved by grace from Egyptian tyranny. It was not a list of rules to follow to earn their salvation. They were saved first, then given instructions on how to live out their new identity.

It is in this Law that God clarifies His concern for the poor by commanding Israel to show special care for them. Later in Israel’s history, God sends prophets to remind them of His priorities, criticizing them for ignoring Him in this area. God’s concern for the poor and oppressed continues in the New Testament, where Jesus and His apostles provide deeper commentary.

Discussion: There are dozens of references in the Old Testament about God’s concern for the poor, the widow, the orphan, or the alien (e.g. there are 161 references at biblicalfact.com/old_testament_poor). Read each of the following verses as a few examples from the Hebrew scriptures and discuss how God reveals His concern for the poor:

1. **Leviticus 23:22:** When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God.
2. **Deuteronomy 15:7-11:** If there is among you anyone in need, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be ... Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."
3. **Proverbs 14:31:** Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.
4. **Isaiah 58:6-9:** Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
5. **Isaiah 61:1:** The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners.
6. **Zechariah 7:9-10:** Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.

In this session, we discussed Celsus' criticism of early Christianity because of its appeal to the unsophisticated in society, we defined a Biblical understanding of the poor as both socioeconomic and religious, and briefly explored the Old Testament view of God's concern for the poor that laid the foundation for Jesus' teachings on this subject. In the next session, we will look at Jesus' personal life and teachings that embody God's concern for the poor, and the implications for those who follow Him.

Assignment: Read the appendix: *Living in the Upside-down Kingdom* ⁴ and pick one verse to memorize.

Session 2: Jesus' Ethical Application

In Session 1, we explored God's concern for the poor as revealed in the Old Testament Law and Prophets. In Session 2, we will look at Jesus' continuation of those values in His personal life and ministry, which has implications for His followers.

Jesus' Preference for the Poor

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the poor are marked for special care, but Jesus took this to a new level. By entering the world as a human baby, into a family living in poverty, He immediately identified with the poor. He was presumed to be born illegitimately to working-class parents and grew up in obscurity. As an adult, He never owned property nor had formal education and was scorned by the established authorities.

In addition to His personal identification with the poor, His teachings about His Kingdom are clear that He will work disproportionately through the poor instead of the rich and powerful. James said it clearly: "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?" (Js. 2:5). Look at the following five examples to see why James could be so confident in Jesus' preference for the poor:

1. Jesus inaugurated His ministry by singling out the poor:

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 18 '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, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' 20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'" (Lk. 4:16-21).

2. Jesus proved His credentials to John the Baptist by His work among the poor:

"Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' 4 And Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me'" (Mt. 11:2-6).

3. Jesus measured the effect of true transformation through a response to the poor, illustrated in the salvation of Zacchaeus:

“He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.’ 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, ‘He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.’ 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.’ 9 And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham’” (Lk. 19:1-9).

4. Jesus articulated the characteristics of His followers in what are called the Beatitudes, with a clear disposition toward those who are on the less powerful end of life:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt. 5:3-11).

5. Jesus includes the rich and powerful in His family (such as Zacchaeus and Joseph of Arimathea), but makes it clear how difficult it is for the rich to embrace His Kingdom:

“And Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.’ 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ 26 But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’ (Mt. 19:23-26).

Discussion

1. How does Jesus' teaching on the poor connect to the teaching of the Hebrew scriptures?
2. Which of the passages most surprise or trouble you? Why?
3. What do you think about James' statement in Js. 2:5?

The Danger of Being Rich

R.E. Nixon said, "In the teaching of Jesus, material possessions are not regarded as evil, but as dangerous. The poor are often found to be happier than the rich, because it is easier for them to have an attitude of dependence upon God."⁵ This is shown both in the Hebrew scriptures as well as the New Testament teaching.

Deut. 8:12-14: "... when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, 14 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."

Mt. 6:19-21: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

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."

1 Cor. 1:27-29: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

1 Tim. 6:9-11, 17: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs ... 17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Js. 2:6-7. "Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?"

Js. 5:1-6: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you."

Heb. 13:5: "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

Rev. 3:17: "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

Discussion

- 1. What are your thoughts about Nixon's statement that material possessions are dangerous?**
- 2. What passage stands out to you the most. Why?**
- 3. What are the implications of these principles for your life?**

In this session, we explored Jesus' preference to work through the poor to build His Kingdom, and also looked at the dangers of being rich. In the next session, we will discuss practical ways to represent Jesus' interests with regard to the poor.

Assignment: Invite a local pastor who ministers among the poor to talk to the group (in person or Zoom) about their experience working among the poor (contact Bob Engel for a referral at bengel@tumi.org).

Session 3: Your Response to Jesus' Ethics

In the last session, we explored Jesus' preference to work through the poor and the dangers of being rich and powerful. In the next session, we will discuss practical ways to represent Jesus' interest with regard to the poor.

Identifying The Poor Socioeconomically

In Session 1, we explained that the poor are understood in both a socioeconomic way and a religious way. Every society will have a different context of socioeconomic poverty, even America.

The U.S. government utilizes an objective measure of poverty: "if the resources they share with others in the household are not enough to meet basic needs."⁶ But there is another group of people who do not fit into this official category, those who are just emerging from poverty or in danger of slipping into it. So in America, there are those stuck in poverty, but also a fringe element that are in imminent danger. Such is the case in other countries as well.

All over the world, an increasing number of people are moving from rural to urban areas, especially among the poor. As they come to cities to escape poverty, they often find it difficult to live in the city because they lose the family and friend support of a rural setting. Crime, increased unemployment, higher cost of living, drug abuse, and family breakdown can be the result, leading to even more poverty.

Being poor is not so much a matter of how many possessions a person has, but rather how much power they have to change their situation. A person can be in poverty, just out of poverty, or precariously close to poverty, but in every case, a person is poor when they have very little control over their socioeconomic situation.

The Causes of Poverty

There are four fundamental sources of poverty.

1. Most often, people are trapped in poverty by circumstances beyond their control. They live in an unjust system that gives them no hope of escape.
2. Others may have a physical disability that precludes them from working to meet their needs and they have no family support structure to help them.
3. Others have fallen into drug or alcohol abuse and do not have the means to escape their addiction. With some help, they can escape and have productive lives.
4. Some are not willing to work hard and are idle. As Paul mentioned in 2 Thess. 3:10-12: "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. 11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. 12 Now such

persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living." When this is the case, the idle need to be warned so they pull their own weight.

It is important to understand these different categories because many people make the mistaken assumption that most if the poor fit the fourth category, that their poverty is their own fault. In some cultures, it is even believed that poverty is a curse from God, that being poor is a sign of the person's disobedience to God. There is also a false teaching called the Prosperity Gospel that perpetuates this error.

The fact is that most of the world's poor are in their position because of the disobedience and oppression of the rich and powerful who keep the poor in their position of vulnerability. The rich often justify their wealth by blaming the poor for their condition.

Four Fundamental Responses

Once you have understood how to recognize the poor, you can respond in a Christlike way, guarding against paternalism, which can show up in two ways: 1) having low expectations, believing they cannot do as much as the rich and powerful; 2) giving leadership to a person who is not equipped to do the work, as a kind of tokenism. In between these two extremes is a healthy middle ground employing the following four principles:

1. Maintain high expectations: Many people have low expectations for the poor because they look through the lens of the world rather than through God's perspective. In Jesus' Kingdom, there is no distinction between rich and poor in the power we possess to carry out His work, as seen in these passages:

Jesus said of His followers: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father" (Jn. 14:12).

Peter said: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire" (2 Pe. 1:2-4).

Paul said: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to

himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Being poor is never an excuse for ignoring the responsibilities given to every ambassador of Christ. Help the poor understand they have equal access to God's power, using their gifts and talents for His Kingdom. When you show confidence in them, it helps them believe it themselves.

2. Offer compassionate justice: In many cases, there are governmental and institutional policies in place that deny justice to the poor and oppressed, and keep the rich in power. Followers of Jesus should resist those structures and seek to break them down, giving opportunity for the poor to receive just treatment.

For example, in the U.S. there are efforts to reform laws regarding bail set for prisoners that make life more difficult for the poor.⁷ When a poor person is arrested upon suspicion of a crime, they may be proven to be innocent after their trial, but while waiting for trial they have to stay in jail unless a friend or relative puts up money for bail to have them released. Many poor people do not have anyone who can afford this, so the prisoner often loses their job, which affects the person's family, and deepens their poverty.

Another example in recent American history is called the "War on Drugs." In the 1980s laws were set to disproportionately punish the poor in terms of cocaine possession.⁸ The cheaper version ("crack cocaine") was available in a raw, unrefined form, so it was more affordable to the poor, while the expensive version (powdered cocaine) was already refined and ready for immediate and concentrated use. Federal laws were set to sentence crack possession at 50 grams, while the sentencing for powder cocaine possession was set at 100 times that amount.

While many of these laws have since changed, the damage has been devastating, resulting in massive incarceration of the poor over the ensuing decades. This left the underclass bereft of male leadership for generations that devastated family structures, increased crime rates, and deepened poverty in America's inner cities.⁹

Those in power can use their influence to address systemic injustices like these on behalf of the poor. For several other American examples, see the article at: <https://equaljusticeunderlaw.org/8-ways-our-legal-system-punishes-people-who-are-poor>.

3. Avoid crippling dependence: While society rejects the poor and regards them as useless, God sees them as a natural place to raise up leaders for His Kingdom. If you respect God, you need to respect the poor. This means moving beyond benevolence. While it is good to help people in their plight, it is important to avoid dependence that takes away a person's dignity. The poor need opportunities where they can participate in their journey out of poverty, not just continual handouts that perpetuate their poverty.

For example, many well-meaning people have offered to give large amounts of food to nations having starving people. However, when this happens, farmers in those countries cannot compete with the distribution of free food, putting them into poverty and making the poor dependent on a continuous supply of free food. A better solution is to offer farmers better agricultural technologies so they can provide food to the people in their country, offer more jobs, and build the economy from within.

4. Teach the Gospel: Of all the responses to the poor, none is more important than offering the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. No social program can replace the liberation that comes through a new identity in Jesus and His Church. A person who is in Christ becomes a child of the King, with all the resources of His Kingdom, with authority over principalities and powers, and participation in a new worldwide, multi-generational family. The freedom, wholeness, and justice of His reign transcends whatever the world can offer.

Summary

Maintain a high standard of expectation for the poor, while using your influence to bring systemic justice and avoid crippling dependence. Seek to empower the poor, not just give them handouts. And most of all, share the Gospel message, urging them to rely on God rather than others.

Discussion

1. **Compare the facts about poverty in a U.S. to poverty in your home country.**
2. **Of the four responses to the poor, which one is most striking to you? Why?**
3. **What are some things you can do in your home country to respond in these four ways?**

Practical Applications

Read the following passages to prompt practical responses to the poor in your home country's context.

Lk. 14:12-14: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Mt. 25:31-46: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

2 Tim. 2:2: "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

Jn. 14:23-24: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."

Js. 2:1-4: "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your
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assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” 4 have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

1 Jn. 3:17-18: “But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

Discussion

- 1. Which of the passages are most striking to you? Why?**
- 2. What practical ideas do you have for responding to Jesus from these passages?**
- 3. What will you do next as a result of these commands?**

In this session, we explored how to identify the poor and practical responses to their situation.

Assignment: Ask your local urban pastor contact for a recommendation to visit a person in the low-income community. Take a bus ride together to get there. Arrange to have lunch at a locally-owned restaurant with the pastor or one of the church's leaders to talk about life in the community.

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Endnotes

¹ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Mission* (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 45. Reference from World Impact's Missionary Orientation Training Course (Los Angeles, World Impact Press), 1996, p. 32.

² Don Davis and Terry Cornett, *World Impact's Missionary Orientation Training Course* (Los Angeles, World Impact Press), 1996, p. 35.

³ Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, (Waco: Word Books, 1982) pg. 68-69. Reference from World Impact's Missionary Orientation Training Course (Los Angeles, World Impact Press), 1996, p. 35-36.

⁴ "Ethics of the New Testament", is from *Planting Churches among the City's Poor: An Anthology of Urban Church Planting Resources, Volume 1 -- Theological and Missiological Perspectives for Church Planters*, page 109. Copyright © 2001 The Urban Ministry Institute, a ministry of World Impact, Inc. Used by permission. All Rights Reserved.

⁵ R.E. Nixon, "Poverty," *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, et al., (Leicester, England: IVP, 1980), p.1225. Reference from World Impact's Missionary Orientation Training Course (Los Angeles, World Impact Press), 1996, p. 35.

⁶ www.census.gov

⁷ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/incomejails.html>

⁸ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/sp/1003.pdf>

⁹ For a broader discussion on the issue of mass incarceration in America, see *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, by Michelle Alexander (The New Press), 2012.