

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD + -

THE INVENTION OF CHARITY: JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND THE GOD OF THE POOR

This segment comes from **EPISODE 3: RICH + POOR**.

From decadent medieval popes to modern televangelists with private jets, religion and money can make for an unsavoury mix. But why do we think of charity – care for the poor and the sick – as a good in the first place? The Graeco-Roman world didn't think so: they mostly thought the poor and suffering deserved what they got. This segment traces how Jewish thought, turbocharged by the teaching of Jesus, transformed the way we think vulnerable people should be treated.



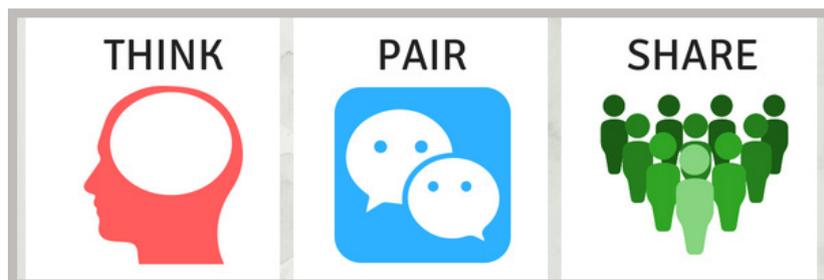
THEME QUESTION

Is it your impression that the Church is more focused on **giving** or on **getting**?



ENGAGE

1. Write your definition of the word “generosity”.
- 2.



- a. Describe a time when you've been generous to another person or group of people.
- b. Describe a time when someone has been really generous to you.
- c. Write down good and bad reasons to be generous in the following table.

Good reasons	Bad reasons

3. Make a collage of four images that symbolise the word “charity”, and explain why you chose those images.
4. Imagine you have been given a magic wand that allows you to help one group, in one place, at one time. Which group would you choose to help, and why?



UNDERSTAND AND EVALUATE



WATCH the segment: “The invention of charity: Jews, Christians, and the God of the poor”
(cpx.video/charity)

1. What were the “older foundations” that the Christian commitment to charity was based on?
2. What is your reaction to the Old Testament idea that “the surplus of the rich belongs to the poor”? What might this show us about the character of God?
3. How did the early Christians expand the Jewish idea of caring for the poor?
4. Evaluate how the values of community care and generosity may have contributed to the growth of Christianity.
5. Why did Emperor Julian panic? What did this cause him to do? Re-enact a conversation that Julian might have had about this with one of his advisers.
6. What was ironic about Julian’s response to the Christians’ welfare program?
7. Markus Bockmuehl says that “the values of welfare, of care for widows and orphans, of the support of those who are weak” are “in a sense a response to God’s grace and a response to God’s reaching out to humanity”.

- a. Brainstorm what you know about what “God’s grace” means.
- b. Brainstorm what you think “God’s reaching out to humanity” is referring to.
- c. In what ways could the actions of these early Christians be seen to be motivated by the belief in God’s grace and the belief in the value of every human person?
- d. How might these values have shaped the way modern society cares for the poor?



BIBLE FOCUS

READ Deuteronomy 24:19-21.

1. What does God command the Israelites to do in these verses?
2. What would have been challenging about this?

READ Luke 12:32-34

1. How could someone sell all their possessions and give to the poor, and not be afraid of the future?
2. What do you think Jesus means when he says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”?

READ Acts 2:42-47.

1. Draw an image to reflect the description of the early church in this passage. What strikes you about this?

A APPLY

1. Do you show generosity to others? How could you show more?
2. Imagine you are given a grant to create your own charity. Make a poster with the key information about what your charity would be for, and the principles behind it.
3. How could you apply the principle from Deuteronomy in today's society? Are there any modern examples of this?

✍ EXTEND

1. Research a current Australian charity that is helping the poor, and answer the following questions:
 - a. What principles guide their work?
 - b. Do you think they have been influenced by Judeo-Christian values? If so, in what ways?