



STUDY GUIDE

Caring for the Least of These

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vision for ministry

from the makers of RELEVANT

As the issue of global poverty is raised during ONE Sabbath, it seems appropriate that we begin to engage in discussion about practical ways we can serve the marginalized both in our local communities and abroad. The passages below, excerpted from various books, serve as jumping-off points for us to dialogue within our churches and ministries the impact of global poverty—and what our role is in fighting it.

THE REVOLUTION

EDITED BY HEATHER ZYDEK (RELEVANT BOOKS)

“The idea that giving to the poor is giving to God can be found throughout the Bible. It should be noted that nowhere does it mention giving only to those poor who are deserving or worthy, or those who are poor through no fault of their own. No. Giving is an act of mercy. What is mercy? It is when one is spared the negative consequences of one’s misbehavior. The poor are not presumed to be innocent, nor are we to judge them to be guilty. When we are confronted by them, we are given an opportunity to respond as we would hope God would respond to us in our poverty. It is the tender mercies of God that lead men to repentance (Romans 2:4). When you give money to a sinner in Jesus’ name, you are making an investment for both his and your future in the Kingdom of God ... Every human being starts his or her life with wonderful potential and hope. Each person is a unique, unrepeatable reflection of the glory of God, made in His image. This is true, whether he or she is homeless, addicted, in prison, shopping at the local grocery store or singing next to you in choir. Each one was once a beautiful baby in someone’s arms. God loves everyone we meet and sees something that is worthy of redemption. He is not willing to throw anyone away. I instruct all of the volunteers who work with The King’s Jubilee (a homeless outreach program) to pray this simple prayer: ‘Lord, let me see what it is that You love about each person I meet.’ It is powerful. But I warn you, be prepared to have your heart broken.” (p. 183–84)

Selection taken from “Poverty,” by Cranford Joseph Coulter

1. Do you or your community ever find yourselves thinking that impoverished people don’t deserve your help? What do you believe has generated these ideas?
2. How can you, using Coulter’s definition of mercy, battle that thought?
3. How would you want God to respond to you in your poverty or in the poverty of your community? Are you responding to the impoverished like that?
4. Currently, 1 billion people worldwide lack access to clean water, and 2.6 billion lack access to basic sanitation. The repercussions are huge: Water-related diseases are the No. 1 killer of innocent lives, causing approximately 6,000 deaths every day; and a child dies every 15 seconds from an illness stemming from unsafe water and inadequate sanitation. But studies show that for every \$1 invested in cleaning up water and sanitation, there is an \$8 return in the form of reduced health-care costs and increased productivity. What are you willing to invest to join this fight? What are

some other ways you can encourage your community to advocate for the needy?

5. How can you incorporate ideas like Coulter's prayer at the end of the passage into your service projects and programs?

DANGEROUS FAITH

BY JOEL VESTAL (NAVPRESS)

"The 'share' of the total global income among the poorest 20 percent of the world's people now stands at a miserable 1.1 percent, down from 1.4 percent in 1991 and 2.3 percent in 1960. It continues to shrink. On the other end of the spectrum, the ratio of the income of the top 20 percent to that of the poorest 20 percent rose from 30 to 1 in 1960 to a startling new high of 78 to 1 in 1994 ... I share these facts not to overwhelm you but because we as followers of Jesus must be educated. This information just scratches the surface, but I hope it will impress upon you the severity of issues around the world that demand our concern, attention and response. I believe we act upon what we know and understand. I realize that sharing statistics like these can have the tendency to make us feel paralyzed and overwhelmed. This is where the Holy Spirit must inspire and empower our minds and hearts to receive this information and then grant wisdom on how we can respond effectively." (p. 163)

From Dangerous Faith by Joel Vestal. Used by permission of NavPress. Copyright 2007, all rights reserved. www.navpress.com

1. Are you encouraging your community to become educated about poverty issues? Are you taking it upon yourself to become more educated?
2. How are you enabling your community not only to learn about statistics like these, but to understand them? How are you framing them so that they hit close to home or are more accessible?
3. Have you let apathy or analysis paralysis from the overwhelming statistics of the world's poor infect your community? Have you labeled the situation "too hopeless"? What does Vestal say to do in that situation? What have you done—or what can you do—to move past that into action?
4. Are you seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance for creativity and wisdom so your community can respond to poverty in a way that is filled with love, compassion and mercy?
5. In this day and age, the Internet is an limitless educational resource. Take advantage and educate yourself and those around you as the first action step toward poverty relief. According to a Barna study, "Two out of every three adults (67%) claimed to have had some type of intentional and significant personal interaction with a poor person in the past year." Where would you fall? What can you do to join the fight against poverty and help motivate those around you?

BUTTERFLY IN BRAZIL

BY GLENN PACKIAM (TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS)

"Burning hearts for lost souls don't make anything happen; but hands used to make a meal, build a shed, clean a home or wash some feet are doing 'the good work that God has prepared in advance for us to do.' God's work is being done to change the world. But it is being done by followers of Christ, here and there, who do the small things and do them faithfully and persistently. The church in rural India, the school in Mississippi, the village in Uganda, the orphanage in Romania, the business in Iowa, the factory in China—these are all sections of the wall where God's workers are placed. And as we do the work, God Himself is building His Kingdom, the New Jerusalem. The work God has given each of us is aimed toward bringing new citizens into the city of God. If we refuse to build our part of the wall, someone else will do it and we will have no part in the greatness of that work. Lasting change doesn't happen in the blink of an eye or a thousand beats of the heart. Lasting change is the result of faithfully working where you are, creating small change over a long period of time." (p. 96–97)

This article is adapted from Butterfly in Brazil: Copyright 2007 © by Glenn Packiam. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

1. How is your community involved in manual labor for the needy? How is your community involved in caring for the needy in your local neighborhood?
2. Do you ever find yourself frustrated that God will only allow your community to do “small things”? Do you ever want to move toward bigger projects? What compels this desire, and what does Packiam’s illustration of building the wall have to do with it?
3. Are you and your community seeking ways in which God wants you to be involved in lasting change?
4. Are you teaching your community about the importance of small acts of mercy and compassion that they can do in their home, office or school?
5. There are many organizations available with which you and your community can serve, and many individuals have already seized the opportunity. According to an Americorps reports, “Nearly 61 million Americans volunteered in their communities in 2007.” What have you done in the last year to make a difference for the poor and underserved in your area? What can you do this year?

SMALL FOOTPRINT, BIG HANDPRINT

BY TRI ROBINSON (AMPELON PUBLISHING)

“Our adventure begins when we start proclaiming and demonstrating the message of the Kingdom of God. Some churches choose to ignore or minimize the demonstration of the message, stating that they don’t want to develop a social gospel. But there is only one Gospel, which is a proclamation of the Good News through both our mouths and our actions. As the Church, we cannot simply behave as a charity, sweeping under the rug our motivation for serving others. Nor can we simply talk about the Gospel without doing anything about it. Daring faith does both, getting dirty when necessary through serving others and speaking the truth when the time calls for it. Now more than ever, people who profess to be followers of Jesus must resist casual Christianity in lieu of coming to the aid of a world in decline. Everywhere we look, there are images of a suffering humanity just begging for the practical demonstrations of the Gospel. Digging wells in Africa, caring for those infected with HIV, rescuing those trapped in sex slave trade, building houses in the Gulf Coast region—this is the heart of God. Without a doubt, these are some of the issues Jesus would have addressed if He lived during our lifetime. How poised the Church is to experience a real reformation by coming to the aid of a dying world that feels hopelessly trapped in a never-ending cycle of poverty and sickness. The world needs to experience a practical demonstration of the Gospel in order to realize that there is a God in Heaven who not only knows each person’s name but also knows each person’s pain. God’s love for us runs so deep that He uses broken people who have discovered His empowering love to demonstrate love to those in dire need of assurance that God is still there—and that He cares.” (p. 45–46)

Reprinted from Small Footprint, Big Handprint: How to Live Simply and Love Extravagantly by Tri Robinson with permission from Ampelon Publishing, 2008.

1. Robinson talks about his disapproval of churches that focus solely on speaking the Gospel or on service. He believes all churches should do both. Where does your community stand on this issue? Does your community take part in both evangelism and service?
2. If your community does take part in service programs, are they ones in which people are truly in need? Do you feel like your community is having to “get dirty” and serve those who might not get that service from anyone else?
3. When you read the list of issues Robinson describes, do you feel a strong connection with any of them? Reflect on your life experiences. What issue or issues do you feel God might be leading you toward?
-4..... Is your community a part of the reformation Robinson talks about, one where the needy will “experience a practical.....

demonstration of the Gospel in order to realize that there is a God in heaven who not only knows each person's name but knows each person's pain"? If not, what steps can you take to get involved?

5. Do you and your community truly believe God can use you? If not, what can you do to build up your trust and faith?
6. Though the issues seem daunting, small victories show us that we can reverse the tragedies of the world. For example, thousands of lives can be saved through proper medication against the diseases that plague many third-world nations. It only takes \$140 to provide someone suffering from HIV/AIDS with a yearlong supply of antiretroviral medication; treatment for TB—which kills roughly 2 million people annually—is as little as \$16 per person. What can you do to join in this fight to rid the planet of these diseases? Will you donate money? Will you press your local government to support increased funding for programs focused on treating these diseases, such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)?

PRAYERS FOR A NEW SOCIAL AWAKENING

BY WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH (PILGRIM PRESS)

God of Righteous Bounty,

We are moved by your grace to work for justice for hungry people.

We know that you hear the prayer of the mother in Mozambique whose child is crying for food. We know that you hear the prayer of the father in Minnesota who is trying to make ends meet and feed his family. Be a balm to them, our God, and give them strength as they work to better their lives.

Please hear our prayers as well. We pray that you will give us the conviction to answer your call to serve and to speak out for hungry people.

We pray for the leaders of our nation—the decision makers who can redirect billions of dollars of help and opportunity with the stroke of a pen.

Help them to hear the cries of hungry people that are ringing in our own ears, the cries that are so close to your very heart. Give our leaders the courage, the vision, and the wisdom to help us create a world where all are fed.

Thank you, God, for helping us turn our faith into action, for amplifying our voices. Thank you that when we speak out for hungry people, the miracle of the loaves and fishes happens again and again.

We believe that you are moving in our time to end hunger, and we are grateful that you include us as a part of this great liberation.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who still feeds the multitude.

Amen.”

Selection taken from “For an End to Hunger,” by the Rev. David Beckmann. Beckmann is the president of Bread for the World, a collective Christian voice urging our nation’s decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. Formerly with the World Bank, he is a Lutheran pastor, called at his ordination to serve as a missionary economist.

Excerpted from Prayers for the New Social Awakening: Inspired by the New Social Creed, edited by Christian Iosso and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, published 2008 by Westminster John Knox Press.

1. Is praying prayers such as these a priority for you and your community?

2. What overarching needs specific to your community can you be praying about
3. What are you doing to speak out for and support those who are hungry or less fortunate? What may be limiting you in your efforts to speak and act out in the name of justice?
4. Is your community involved with political avenues for lessening poverty, including legislation in the U.S. House and Senate?
5. One approach to lowering poverty that has proven effective is debt-cancellation—relieving poor countries of their debt burdens. Tanzania has put its savings from debt-cancellation policies toward education, resulting in an increase of schoolchildren from 1.6 million to 3.1 million in 2003. Other countries, such as Mozambique and Cameroon, have put the money toward health programs and vaccinations. What can you do to encourage your local government to increase debt relief for countries who haven't yet received it?

To continue this discussion on global poverty and what you can do to make a change, head over to NeueMinistry.com, where you can read frequently updated articles and blogs from leading voices within the Church as well as join an online community of ministry leaders such as yourself who are looking to be God's Kingdom to a world in need.