

## Why & How We Love the Poor

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

2 Corinthians 8:9

“If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.”

Isaiah 58:10

## Foreword

Our city is a mosaic of different groups, each with a unique complex of needs. The Rooted Church is surrounded by growing numbers of the unemployed and underemployed, new immigrant populations, unwed mothers, prisoners, the homeless, the elderly, the abused, the dying, sick, and disabled. Poverty is on our doorstep, the percentage of the elderly is exploding, ethnics are pouring in. We are home to 20,000 refugees made up of 45 different ethnicities, 8,000 medically homebound, and as many as 5,000 homeless people (61% women and children). Seventeen percent of men and 25% of women in our city are victims of sexual abuse. We host four major jails, dozens of strip clubs, and close to 300 gangs with almost 6,000 members. Why is our city this way? Does the church have a role to play? Should we help? Why? How?

We firmly believe that we *do* have a role to play, and this paper is an effort to lay out a biblical framework for how we as a church think and act in response to the problems we see all around us. For the sake of simplicity, we'll refer to the weak, elderly, mentally and physically handicapped, refugees, new immigrants, working poor, natural disaster victims, unemployed, single parent families, the abused, orphans, etc. all under the heading of “the poor,” and the myriad of social problems we see as “poverty.” These terms will become more clear later.

Admittedly, when it comes to poverty we often want to look for a way of escape, a simplified system that will free us from having to deal with these issues again. This is not how Jesus wants us to view those in need. In John 6, when large, hungry crowds came toward Jesus, we read this:

Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

Jesus aims to test us, to search us constantly in regard to why and how we give and serve. Our goal should not be to develop a system that allows us to conveniently and mechanically “care” for those in need. Rather, we need to struggle over these issues, check our motives, and involve our lives in messy ways with messy people until that day poverty is gone forever. What follows, then, is not the final word on how we do this. Rather, may it serve as a starting point for us to truly become a city-loving church.

## I. From Ruin...

God created all things, and he created all things good (Gen. 1:31). Humans were created as dependent beings. Adam and Eve had needs, but they knew no pain since all their needs were immediately and continuously met by God.<sup>1</sup> Suffering, poverty, hunger and brokenness had no place in the world.

As God's image bearer, Adam was to bring all things under the order and rule of God (Gen. 1:28). Instead of giving allegiance to God, however, Adam and his wife chose to rebel against him in an effort to make themselves gods (Gen. 3:2-6), thus bringing sin into the world. Now separated from God, they were cursed by God and cast out of his kingdom. Ever since, all humanity finds itself in the same position (Rom. 5:12): under the curse of God and with unfulfilled dependencies that bring us emptiness, frustration, and pain in all areas of life. The ruin that human sin causes can be placed into four categories:<sup>2</sup>

1. **Spiritual Ruin:** We are alienated from God (Gen. 3:8), causing guilt, hostility, fear, and judgment.
2. **Psychological Ruin:** We are alienated from ourselves (Gen. 3:10), causing loss of identity and meaning and resulting in shame, anxiety and emptiness.
3. **Social Ruin:** We are alienated from each other (Gen. 3:7), causing war, crime, family breakdown, oppression, and injustice.
4. **Physical Ruin:** We are alienated from nature itself (Gen. 3:17-19), causing pain, hunger, sickness, aging, and physical death.

These four relationships (with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation) are the building blocks for all of life. When they are functioning properly, humans experience the fullness of life that God intended because we are being what God created us to be. That is, when these relationships are functioning properly, people are able to fulfill their calling of glorifying God by working and supporting themselves and their families with the fruit of that work.<sup>3</sup>

Our rebellion against God has ruined these foundational relationships. The result is poverty. Due to the comprehensive nature of the fall, every human being is "poor" in the sense of not experiencing these relationships in the way that God intended. Every one of us suffers from a poverty of spiritual intimacy, a poverty of being, a poverty of community, and a poverty of stewardship.<sup>4</sup> Poverty, then, is the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 46.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller treatment of the four concentric circles of alienation, see *ibid.*, 46-51, and Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 56-62.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 57.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63.

are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom (God's peace and wholeness) in all its meanings.<sup>5</sup>

Poverty not only affects us as individuals, but the systems we create as well. Our economic, social, political, and religious systems reflect our ruined relationships with God, self, others, and the rest of creation. For example, social ruin has caused politicians to pass laws institutionalizing slavery and racial discrimination. Physical ruin leads some companies to needlessly pollute and destroy the environment.<sup>6</sup>

These four areas also highlight the fact that human beings are multifaceted, implying that poverty-alleviation efforts should be multifaceted as well. If we reduce humans to simply being physical – as Western thought is prone to do – our efforts will tend to focus on material solutions. But if we remember that humans are spiritual, psychological, social, and physical beings, our efforts will be more holistic in their design and execution.<sup>7</sup>

## II. ...to Renewal

So what is the solution to all these forms of poverty? God, in his love, has taken steps to renew all that we have ruined. God's first redemptive action, the clothing of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21), points to the later sacrifice of Jesus for sinners, but it also displays the renewal he brings to all areas of life. God meets a deep psychological need (for privacy), a bedrock social need (for the marriage relationship), and a fundamental physical need (for shelter). In this first "deed ministry" God reveals that his redemption will heal all the ruining effects of sin.

God incarnated himself in the person of Jesus Christ to accomplish this redemption and bring renewal to everything that we ruined once and for all. During his earthly life and ministry, Jesus provided glimpses of the great renewal that he was bringing by healing bodies and preaching to the poor (Mt. 11:1-5). He lived with, ate with, and called to himself the lowest classes of society. He called this "mercy" (Mt. 9:13). He cast out demons (Mk. 1:34), restored relationships (Mk. 1:42-44), and calmed storms (Mk. 4:39).

Ultimately, to renew the ruin that we caused through rebellion, Jesus would need to deal with the rebellion itself. He could crush the rebellion by crushing the rebels (you and me), or he could identify himself as lead rebel and crush himself as our representative. He chose the latter.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God...God through Christ reconciled us to himself... (2 Cor. 5:21, 17).

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<sup>5</sup> Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 86.

<sup>6</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 58-59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

Through Jesus, his death, and resurrection, every effect of sin is reversed. All creation is renewed.

1. **Spiritual Renewal:** It is only through Christ that we are reconciled to God.

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Rom. 5:8-11).

2. **Psychological Renewal:** Jesus, in giving his people new hearts and new identities, heals the internal ruin we experience due to sin.

...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and...be renewed in the spirit of your minds,...put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:22-24).

3. **Social Renewal:** Inside the Church, Jesus binds together individuals who would never love and serve alongside each other outside the Church, and in doing so provides a glimpse of the perfect unity present in heaven.

We are members one of another...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4:25, 31-32).

4. **Physical Renewal:** Through Jesus, even the natural order will be redeemed. This is what Paul referred to when he said:

The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:20-21).

The gospel is the means by which all poverty will be alleviated and the entire world and all dimensions of life will be perfectly renewed. As one writer says it, “The purpose of grace is the removal of the cancer of sin, first from the heart of man, its root, but also, and finally, from the entirety of the created order.”<sup>8</sup> At the consummation of history, we see this glorious goal – a beautifully restored creation that flourishes under and rejoices in the power and authority of God – finally realized:

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<sup>8</sup> Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2005), 287.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:1-5).

### Summary

God created the world to be under his rule and authority. All things were made to be managed by him, and thus they are only what they should be when in his control. Sin disrupted our recognition of the rule of God, and the universe has fallen into decay and death in every dimension, the result of which is poverty in all its forms. Christ came to bring the kingdom of God back to earth through his atoning death and resurrection. As individuals repent and believe in the gospel, they give allegiance to Jesus and his rule, and they begin to experience the renewing effects of his kingdom. In time, all creation will be restored to health, beauty, and freedom.<sup>9</sup>

## III. The Church & Renewal

If this is God's aim – to unleash his kingdom in the world through the power of the gospel so that the effects of sin can be healed and the authority of God can be rejoiced in – this must be the aim of the church as well. After all, the church is God's vehicle for displaying his glory to his creation, including not only humanity but even unseen spiritual powers. Ephesians 3:10-11 tells us that "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." Imagine that! Heavenly creatures look to us to see more of God! We are to be one of God's chief pieces of evidence for his infinite beauty and worth. We are to vindicate God's character against all the slander that God is not the King. We have been entrusted by God with the glory of His own name!<sup>10</sup>

The Church, then, is not simply a collection of individuals who are forgiven. It is a "chosen people...a royal...holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9). The church is to be a new society on earth whose allegiance is to King Jesus in all things. The world must see in us what family, business, education, art, and relationships can be in all their wholeness and beauty under the kingship of Jesus Christ. We are a pilot plant of the kingdom of God!<sup>11</sup>

The tool God uses to build his new society is the gospel. Jesus' first public sermon announced this plan, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). The gospel is the news that in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into fellowship with him,

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Dever, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2005), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Tim Keller, "The Gospel and the Poor" lecture notes. Campus Crusade for Christ U.S. Staff Conference. 22 July 2009.

and then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with him forever.<sup>12</sup> The great news is that Jesus came, died, rose, and lives; but it's also that the King is here now ruling in our lives and bringing a revolution of hearts that will transform neighborhoods and nations!<sup>13</sup> We long to see all the effects of sin healed by the power of the gospel, and the church is to use it's God-given gifts and power to promote such renewal.

The primary task of Jesus' people, then, is to proclaim the King! To take part in the spreading of God's kingdom means more than seeing people converted to Jesus. It is seeing lives renewed. It is working for the healing of persons, families, communities, and nations. It is doing deeds of mercy and seeking justice. It is ordering lives and relationships and institutions according to God's authority, that they might realize the blessedness of life in God's kingdom.<sup>14</sup>

This means that the church and all it's work must be uniquely Christian and utterly God-centered. We must never function as if God is not our King. We are not striving to be liked and accepted by all people, nor are we to cowardly present ourselves as neutral on the most important matters of life. We are not another non-profit organization or social needs agency. We do not function like any other system or service. We're the blood-bought bride of the King of all things, and we're expected to represent Jesus and his gospel at all times. John Frame says it like this:

To tell an unbeliever that we can reason with him on a neutral basis, however that claim might help to attract his attention, is a lie. Indeed, it is a lie of the most serious kind, for it falsifies the very heart of the gospel—that Jesus Christ is Lord. For one thing, there is no neutrality. Our witness is either God's wisdom or the world's foolishness. There is nothing in between. For another thing, even if neutrality were possible, that route would be forbidden to us.<sup>15</sup>

Only the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ, and the millions of "mini-churches" (Christian homes) throughout the country, can attack the roots of poverty. Only the church can minister to the whole person. Only the gospel understands that sin has ruined us spiritually, personally, socially, and physically. Only Christians, armed with the Word and the Spirit, planning and working as agents of God's kingdom and the righteousness of Christ, can transform nations, neighborhoods, and broken hearts.<sup>16</sup> As theologian Michael Williams says:

Our continuing experience of brokenness tells us that the powers of sin and death have not been routed. The creation still groans under the burden of sin. Men and nations still evidence the effects of the fall...The kingdom at present is hidden, advancing in secret... (it) has invaded history without disrupting the present order. It grows slowly within human affairs. The reign of sin and death will be destroyed and God's rule will know its full glory, but until that day the kingdom of God is hidden to all but those who have faith in Jesus

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<sup>12</sup> Tim Keller, "The Gospel in All it's Forms", Christianity Today. 23 May 2008. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/spring/9.74.html?start=2>.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Cole, *Search and Rescue* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 45.

<sup>14</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 54.

<sup>15</sup> John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1994), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 26.

Christ...The kingdom at present advances not by revolution or overt power but by the spiritual transformation and moral reformation of the people of God. As a small seed produces the mature tree, the kingdom works from the inside out, transforming and redirecting the life of the believer – and through him his society – toward obedient service to the will of God.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Church as an example of the kingdom**

As we've already said, the church must be an example of the healing power of God's rule. The world must see in us what life can be in all its wholeness and beauty under the kingship of Jesus Christ. As N.T. Wright says, we are to "sketch out with pencil what Jesus will one day paint over in indelible ink." It is the church that is to bear in its own life the presence of the kingdom.<sup>18</sup> It is the church that is comprised of people of the age to come living in this age.<sup>19</sup> It is the church that is called to be an advertisement for Christ and his rule.<sup>20</sup> Williams again:

Christ...calls his church to embody the norms, values, and hope of the coming kingdom of God. As Christ was the man from heaven, the church should embody the life and power of heaven in this world. The life, fellowship, and ministry of the Christian community should offer a foretaste of life in the kingdom of God, to reflect something of what the coming kingdom will be.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Church as an agent of the kingdom**

Being an example of the kingdom, however, is not enough. We must also be agents of the kingdom; the means by which God brings others to joyfully give allegiance to the King. This is the clear charge of Scripture:

- You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and *you will be my witnesses* (Acts 1:8).
- But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may *proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light* (1 Pet. 2:9).
- Therefore, *we are ambassadors* for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20).

This charge has two components: words and deeds. First, we must clearly and boldly articulate the message of the gospel to those who need to hear it. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). People must be told the gospel, and we must be the ones to tell it. No one will be saved on the last day by your good deeds. They will only be saved by hearing and responding to the gospel. "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom 10:14).

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<sup>17</sup> Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2005), 246-47.

<sup>18</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 54.

<sup>19</sup> Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2005), 268.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-67.

And yet, our words should often be accompanied by loving deeds of service. Why? We'll mention five reasons.

## IV. Our Motivation to Serve the Poor

### 1) Jesus served the poor

When Jesus is asked by friends of John the Baptist whether or not he is the promised Messiah, he answers "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Lk. 7:22). Later we find Jesus sending out his disciples. They "went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere" (Lk 9:6). Jesus and his followers did both word and deed ministry. Yet their good works were not an end in themselves, for the restoration they brought would again break down. The blind would again lose their eyesight, the lame would again cripple in old age, the resurrected would again die. These good deeds were temporary foretastes of what life in the Kingdom of Jesus will be like.

### 2) We must be people of compassion

Jesus performed these good deeds because he was compassionate. Listen to his words in Matthew 15:32, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." And again, "He went ashore (and) saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk. 6:34). We must follow Jesus in serving the poor because, like our King, we are to be people of compassion.

### 3) Our loving deeds legitimize our message

The good deeds of Jesus and his disciples also lent legitimacy to the gospel message they preached. We see this in places like Acts 8:5-8,

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and *saw the signs that he did*. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.

Our words explain our deeds, and our deeds validate our words. Even though we proclaim that the redemptive power of the kingdom has come, our words will be empty if our lives do not evidence the kingdom's power.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, the unbeliever is not necessarily moved by seeing Christians serving the spiritual and psychological needs of others. They cannot understand the action because they do not feel the need themselves. But they do feel physical needs. When they see Christians feeding the hungry, comforting the suffering, supporting the financially and physically weak, unbelievers see

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 268.

our service and God may use this to soften their hearts to Christ.<sup>23</sup> Most Christians seek only to make the gospel credible, to make it cogent and persuasive intellectually. But people believe in a message mostly for non-rational reasons. A belief appears convincing to the degree that it is supported by a consistent, loving community.<sup>24</sup> So Peter tells us, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12).

#### 4) We are commanded to

Christians are to “do good to everyone” (Gal. 6:10); to open their hand to the needy as far as there is need (1 Jn. 3:16-17; cf. Deut. 15:7-8); to generously share wealth within the church (2 Cor. 8:13-15; cf. Lev. 25). Storing up treasure for yourself and living richly while others suffer in poverty is a grievous sin (Mk. 10:23-25; Jas. 5:1-6; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). Robert Lewis describes the way the early church obeyed the command to live lives of sacrifice and service:

Enter the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the living proof of God. Enter Christians who embraced the Word and, like their Lord, lived it out in word and deed – proof positive to a once proud and now decaying culture that there was, in fact, a better, more noble life. Proclamation was more a matter of essence – in life and death – than it was an enunciation of words. Believers stood firm, often with great sacrifice, in good works anchored by the exhortations that now flow from the pages of the New Testament: “let everyone see your good deeds” (Mt. 5:16); “love your enemies, do good to them” (Lk. 6:31-35); “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35); “overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21); “do good to all people” (Gal. 6:9-10); “we are...created to do good works” (Eph. 2:10); “do not grow weary of doing good” (2 Thess. 3:13); “be rich in good deeds” (1 Tim. 6:17-19); “be eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:11-14); “spur one another to love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24); “be eager to do good” (1 Pet. 3:13).<sup>25</sup>

#### 5) The gospel

I have mentioned some (but certainly not all) of the biblical motivations for loving those who suffer in poverty, but perhaps the greatest reason we are to love and serve the poor is the gospel itself. As Jonathan Edwards said, giving to the poor “is especially reasonable, considering our circumstances, under such a dispensation of grace as that of the gospel.”<sup>26</sup> When Paul asks Christians to be financially generous toward the poor in 2 Corinthians 8, he points to the self-emptying of Jesus, vividly depicting him as becoming poor for us, both literally and spiritually, in the incarnation and on the cross:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich (8:9).

Paul introduces this incredible idea by stating, “I say this not as a command...for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (8:8-9). The argument seems to be that if you grasp

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<sup>23</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 55.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Lewis, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 42-44.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Christian Charity: or, The Duty of Charity to the Poor, Explained and Enforced” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (rev. and corrected by Edward Hickman; 1834; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974), 2:164-5.

substitutionary atonement in both your head and your heart, you will be profoundly generous to the poor. Think about it: the only way for Jesus to get you out of your spiritual poverty and into spiritual riches was to get out of his spiritual riches into spiritual poverty. This should now be the pattern of your life! Give your resources away and enter into need so that those in need will be resourced.<sup>27</sup> As in Paul's command for us to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), we must, in light of Jesus taking our burden upon himself, burden ourselves with the burdens of others. The idea here is not just to give out of our abundance, but to give until we feel the weight of the need ourselves; to give until it hurts (Mk. 12:41-44).

In fact, Jesus teaches that anyone who has truly been touched by the grace of a merciful God *will be* vigorous and sacrificial in helping the needy (Lk. 6:35-36; Mt. 5:43-48). Serving the needs of others is the natural response to grace, so much so that God can actually judge true from false Christians by looking at how they serve the poor (Mt. 25:34ff; Jas. 2:12-14). As Tim Keller says, "Anyone who has no compassion for the helpless has not known the grace of the gospel."<sup>28</sup>

### Summary

God calls the church to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation; to mediate the gospel of God's kingdom to a world estranged from God and steeped in poverty; to be a mission nation. He calls the church to model the kingdom by displaying the righteousness, justice, and peace of the kingdom; to offer a living example of the power of the gospel to redeem men and heal the wounds of sin. The church is also called to be an agent of the kingdom as we proclaim with our words and our lives the kingship of Jesus. Our mission is to bring the rule of God to man.<sup>29</sup>

### A Few Warnings

Before moving on to what this looks like at the Rooted, it's necessary to guard against a few errors in our thinking regarding poverty, renewal, the kingdom of God, and the role that we play.

1. **We are not building the kingdom of God on earth.** God alone builds and expands his kingdom. In the final chapters of Revelation we see the glorified city come down from heaven, not built up by humans. We are invited to joyfully engage in *God's* work of bringing people into *his* kingdom.
2. **We must not expect complete renewal yet.** This is called an "over-realized eschatology" – when we expect now what God only promises for the end. The kingdom of God comes in two stages: it will come fully and finally when Jesus returns to earth, but it has already been inaugurated through the first coming of Jesus (Lk. 17:20-21). So we can and should expect the gospel to bring substantial renewal to all the areas of brokenness we see in and around us, but we should not expect total renewal until Jesus returns. The kingdom is already but not yet.
3. **Our primary aim is not community renewal.** Our primary aim is to glorify God. We want to see lives and communities renewed not merely because it is good for people, but even more so because through their renewal they are saved from God's wrath and

<sup>27</sup> Tim Keller, "The Gospel and the Poor" in *Themelios* 33:3 (December 2008). <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/publications/>.

<sup>28</sup> Tim Keller, *Resources for Deacons* (Atlanta: Christian Education and Publications, 1985), 19.

<sup>29</sup> Michael D. Williams. *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2005), 254-57.

are enabled to delight in him. We long to see God treasured as the good and mighty King by as many people as possible. Renewed lives and communities, as wonderful as they are, are simply what lie in the wake of the King's triumphant procession.

## V. The Complex Question of How?

I've tried to briefly build a case for why we must love and serve the poor. Now the question comes: how do we do it? How do we responsibly carry out the "deed" part of all this? What we're talking about here is traditionally called *mercy ministry*. Mercy ministry is meeting human needs through deeds, with the goal of the spread of the kingship of Jesus.<sup>30</sup> It's also been called *poverty alleviation*,<sup>31</sup> which more broadly is defined as the ministry of reconciliation, since all forms of poverty are ultimately the result of ruined relationships (with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation). It's this latter term we've chosen to use.

The needs we're speaking of are those which take no spiritual discernment to see in oneself or in others. They are "felt" needs. They are also needs which are not directly met when a person becomes a Christian. A man who is born again will starve to death as quickly as a non-Christian. So these material needs are met through actions more than words. The Bible even warns us against doing word ministry when deed ministry is called for (Jas. 2:15-16).<sup>32</sup>

So how do we help alleviate material poverty? It's not as easy as giving food and blankets to poor people. The widespread ruin that sin has created is complex. There are different causes of poverty,<sup>33</sup> different solutions that have been proposed,<sup>34</sup> and different worldviews competing to address these problems.<sup>35</sup> There is never a one-size-fits-all solution. What may seem incredibly helpful may, though done with the best of intentions, bring more harm than help. In this regard, I recommend the book *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert.

### **Relief, Rehabilitation, and Reform** <sup>36</sup>

For example, the authors lay out the three primary avenues for alleviating material poverty. Determining which of the three is the appropriate intervention in any given situation is absolutely

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<sup>30</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 156.

<sup>31</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 78.

<sup>32</sup> Tim Keller, *Resources for Deacons* (Atlanta: Christian Education and Publications, 1985), 18.

<sup>33</sup> Namely, oppression, calamity, and personal sin. See Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 100.

<sup>34</sup> On types of justice (e.g. commercial justice, remedial justice, distributive justice) see Ronald Nash, *The Church and Social Justice* (Lima, Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2002), 27-38.

<sup>35</sup> Very generally, the two dominant political ideologies in the U.S. view poverty very differently. Conservatives see poverty as caused by personal irresponsibility. Liberals see poverty as caused by unjust social systems, and poor individuals have no ability to escape them. Both see only part of the picture.

<sup>36</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 103-120. Also, Tim Keller, "The Gospel and the Poor" lecture notes. Campus Crusade for Christ U.S. Staff Conference. 22 July 2009.

critical, and very often is one of the biggest mistakes North American Christians and churches make.

- **Relief:** This is the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis. Victims of Hurricane Katrina, the Indonesian Tsunami, or an apartment complex destroyed by fire require this immediate relief to “stop the bleeding.” The key feature of relief is that the recipient is largely incapable of helping himself at the time, as in the case of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:34-35). Relief programs alone can create patterns of dependency.
- **Rehabilitation:** This begins once the bleeding has stopped. It restores people and communities to the positive elements of their pre-crisis conditions. The key feature here is working *with*, for example, tsunami victims as they participate in their own recovery.
- **Reform:** Reform moves beyond both relief and rehabilitation and seeks to change conditions and structures that cause poverty in the first place. Reform moves all the people involved – both the helpers and those helped – closer to being in right relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation. The key feature of reform is that it promotes an empowering process in which all the people involved are having all four types of relationships renewed and restored.

Now it gets even trickier. Which of the three should churches be involved with? Godly people have answered this question very differently throughout history, and there is no consensus on the issue, in large part because scripture does not provide a clear answer. Some say the church can and should engage in relief, but rehabilitation should be done primarily through organizations and associations. Reform is often entangled with various political issues, and churches taking political stances on social or economic issues can become very messy and detrimental to their task of proclaiming the gospel. The second and third levels are also very expensive and time consuming, perhaps drawing resources away from the ministry of the word. They are also very complex and may require skill-sets that are beyond the mandate of the elders of a church.

Additionally, the Bible seems to differentiate between the ministry of the church and the ministry of individuals within the church. We use the term somewhat loosely, but a *church* may simply refer to the collection of individual members, or it may refer to the *corporate* church (corporate here meaning “corpus” or “body”). “From him the whole *body*...builds itself up in love, as *each part* does its work” (Eph. 4:16). Quite simply, a church is more than the sum of it’s people.

Accordingly, there are tasks appropriate for the corporate church to engage in and tasks more appropriate to individuals within the church. Corporately, the church is to be a display of God’s glory and wisdom, both to unbelievers and to unseen spiritual powers (Jn. 13:34-35; Eph. 3:10-11); the dwelling place for God’s Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 3:16-17), the organic body of Christ on earth (Acts 9:4; 1 Cor. 12); a pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is God’s vehicle for displaying his glory to his creation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Dever, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2005), 26.

The church is to shape every area of believers' lives with the gospel, but that doesn't mean that the church *as a body* is to carry out all the activity that we equip *members within the body* to do. For example, while the church should equip its members who are filmmakers so that their cinematic art will be profoundly influenced by the gospel, the church should not operate a film production company. The church as the church is commanded to proclaim the gospel, worship and observe the sacraments, and engage in church discipline. Other matters, such as public education, nuclear disarmament, and recycling, are proper concerns for Christians to have, but the church itself is not the structure for addressing such concerns.<sup>38</sup> These issues ought to be engaged in by Christians in schools, governments, and other structures of society. In fact, if such concerns came to be the focus of the church, they could potentially distract the church from its main and unique responsibility, that of incarnating and proclaiming the gospel, as well as lead to unnecessary division.

## VI. Guiding Principles for How We Help Alleviate Material Poverty

In light of the overwhelming material poverty that we find around us and the complexities involved, how does The Rooted Church engage in alleviating poverty with the goal of spreading the kingship of Jesus? Our guiding principles are as follows:<sup>39</sup>

### 1. Loving Jesus over loving people

If you are not a Christian, your works are of no value to God. Anything that does not come from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). If you want to have a mercy ministry, first you need to be ministered to in mercy.<sup>40</sup> You have to let Jesus wash you before you can wash anyone else's feet. This means that our ultimate goal is not simply to see as many people as possible serving others. Our goal is to display the glory of God through people repenting of sin, putting faith in Jesus, and giving all allegiance to him. Non-Christians alleviating poverty is a good thing in the sense of God's common grace, but it brings no honor to God nor does it stem from a heart that trusts him.

### 2. The soul over the body

The value of the soul is infinitely higher than anything material.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Mt. 6:26).

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<sup>38</sup> Certainly the Bible speaks to issues affecting humanity, and the corporate church ought to proclaim and teach from a God-centered worldview on issues of current concern (particularly issues of extreme heinousness: abortion, racism, etc.). This teaching, however, should normally be given without seeming to commit the church to particular policy solutions on problems affecting the wider community. For example, pastors may strenuously advocate the abolition of abortion without spending their sermons laying out specific political agendas on how it is to be done.

<sup>39</sup> We recognize that there are a variety of legitimate approaches to poverty alleviation within the Church. These principles will guide our efforts for where we are currently as a church. They very well may need to be revisited and revised in the future.

<sup>40</sup> This, as well as some of the material contained in these principles, comes from Andy Davis, "The Church & Social Action", The Gospel Coalition 2009 National Conference. 21 April 2009.

If you take a poor man from Lancaster Avenue, give him a roof over his head, nourish him with food, outfit him with clothes, put him through a literacy program that gives him the ability to read, place him in a job training program that enables him to become self-sufficient, find him a job, watch him become a successful, middle class family man – and he dies and goes to hell – it would be of no profit to him. He will not be languishing in hell thinking, “At least I had it good while I lived!”<sup>41</sup>

We are not saying the soul is good and the body is bad, for Jesus will renew and perfect both. We are simply reiterating the words of Jesus, who placed priority on the soul.

You ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you (Jn. 6:26-27).

In 2 Corinthians 4:16–18, Paul speaks of the importance of strengthening the “inner self” even as the outer, physical nature is aging and decaying. Before Jesus healed a paralyzed man in Luke 9, he said to him, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” That statement is of infinite value, for his healed body would again break down, but his soul was washed clean for eternity. The eternal is more important than the temporal.

This means that all of our physical ministry should be done with an eye to the future (Heb. 13:14), with a vision toward our true and lasting home. While we should love and serve our city immensely (Jer. 29:4-7), we ought not focus on Fort Worth as if it will be here forever (Heb. 11:13). We are not attempting to build Fort Worth into the New Jerusalem. Instead, we want to give people a foretaste of the city of God. We should give those to whom we minister a holy whiff of what is to come by how we talk and how we live. We should minister in such a way that we know that everything we touch with our hands is temporary, and our hope is something eternal (2 Ptr. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:16-18). Every home you build will crumble again. Every body you heal will decay again. So when we minister to the hungry, we must say in one way or another, “I want you to know, there’s going to come a day when there will be no hunger. Where we, if we have faith in Jesus, will sit at a banquet table and eat with Jesus himself!”

This also means that when working with those in material poverty, we request entrance into the whole life. At first contact it is important to give aid with few conditions or “strings” as long as it is certain there is a legitimate need. However, if the applicant returns we must soon say, “If we are going to continue to help, you must be willing to let us into your life. There may be habits and patterns that need to be addressed. We aren’t trying to be nosy, we really want to help you for the long run. So if we as a church are to truly help you, we need to look at your whole life.”<sup>42</sup> We do this because our priority and our command is to the soul and not just the body.

### 3. Words over deeds

This is closely tied to the previous point. We minister to the soul by proclaiming the truth of the gospel (Rom. 10:17). So, in general, the teaching of the word takes priority over alleviating material poverty. Many organizations meet physical and material needs; only the church is entrusted to meet spiritual needs with the gospel. As Tim Keller says,

<sup>41</sup> Of course, you may do everything in your power to help this man hear and receive the gospel, and still he may reject it. That is out of our hands. The point here is that we must not neglect ministry to the soul in favor of ministry to the body.

<sup>42</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 97, 226.

The ministry of the word is the most radical ministry. “Radix” is “the root”; to be radical means to go to the root of a thing. Our alienation from God is the root from which all our miseries flow...Thus, the more radical ministry to the condition of man is to proclaim the word of faith (Rom. 10:8-13). There is no more fundamental means to cut the root of sin and death than with the verbal message of the gospel.<sup>43</sup>

As important as our good deeds are, no one will ever be saved by your good example. No one will ever be made right with God by watching your life, as kind and generous and merciful as it may be. God has not ordained those things to save people from their sins. He has ordained the gospel, the proclamation of the word. Words are necessary for people to be made right with the King, so speak the gospel to people!

This does not mean we do not minister to the body. It also doesn't mean we intentionally avoid helping someone materially so that we can preach at them all day. There are clear biblical passages against such a view (e.g. Jas. 2:15-16). The point is that poverty alleviation that is not tied to the proclamation of the gospel is simply an expression of humanitarian sentiment – something the church is not interested in. All poverty alleviation must be a deliberate effort to demonstrate the power of the kingdom of God as we declare the way of entrance into the kingdom, namely, through repentance and faith (Mk. 1:15).<sup>44</sup> Our contention is that the ministry of deeds is a support structure to the ministry of the word. The two go beautifully together, but there is a clear priority among them.

#### 4. Believers over unbelievers

This may seem backwards at first, but it is the clear teaching of the Bible.

As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and *especially to those who are of the household of faith* (Gal. 6:10).

The greatest responsibility God gives to the Rooted in regards to alleviating poverty is to care for the needs of those within our own congregation (Mt. 25:34-40; Acts 6:1-6; Gal. 6:2, 10; Jas. 2:15-16; 1 Jn. 3:17-19). Beyond this, our responsibility is next to believers outside the Rooted, then finally to unbelievers. Many of the texts commonly used to promote the idea of taking responsibility for the well-being of the community in general (e.g., Micah 6:8; Mt. 25:31-46; 1 Jn. 3:16-18) are actually about our charity to members of the covenant community, that is, believers. In fact, Jesus himself said that this is how the world would know we belong to Jesus.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for *one another* (Jn. 13:35).

This does not mean we do not look to alleviate the poverty of unbelievers (“let us do good to *everyone...*”; see also the parable of the Good Samaritan). After all, God offers his mercy to rebellious people (like us!) to make them responsible and whole, so we should render aid with the same end in mind. God did not come to us because we were working for him nor even

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>44</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 97, 210.

because we were willing to work for him.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, we are not forbidden from choosing to alleviate physical needs outside our congregation as a witness to the gospel (e.g., providing computers to local schools, disaster relief, etc.), but our priority must always be toward those who belong to the family of God, and more specifically to those who are members and partners of the Rooted family.

### **5. Individual responsibility over church responsibility**

God created humans to work (Gen. 1:28), and individuals that are able to do so should.

“Keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness...we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you...*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat*” (2 Thess. 3:6-10).

Poverty is in part a failure to glorify God by working and supporting oneself and one's family with the fruit of that work. Ignoring this fact often results in paternalism, or doing things for people that they can do for themselves.<sup>46</sup> For example, serving meals to able-bodied homeless men may very well cause more harm than good. It removes their God-given responsibility to work and it furthers a sense of dependency and inferiority.

Paul's admonition above probably describes a habitual attitude of laziness. Certainly there are times when it would be wrong to require a person to labor for their relief. It would be foolish if we required a bleeding man to “work” by bandaging his own wound! Yet there are times when we need to allow for a person to experience the consequences of his own behavior. We must let mercy limit mercy. That is, we may cut off our aid when it is unmerciful to continue it.<sup>47</sup> In essence, Paul is saying, “Don't keep giving food and support to people who have no incentive to find a living.”

### **6. Family responsibility over church responsibility**

Just as the local church family has the responsibility of caring for its own people, priority must be given to the biological family to care for its own members before anyone else does.

“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8).

When Paul counseled Timothy to care for widows (1 Tim. 5:3-16), one qualification seemed to be lack of alternative sources of support. Thus the instruction that family members should care for the needy first, if at all possible, shows the kind of prioritization of allowing for families (even of unbelievers) to provide support so that the church doesn't have to.<sup>48</sup>

This principle, as well as the ones before it, show us that helping a homeless man who wanders into the church building on Sunday morning is not as simple as handing him bus fare and

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 85, 94.

<sup>46</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 115-119.

<sup>47</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 98.

<sup>48</sup> In general, among the three social institutions God has created – the family, the church, and the state – the closer the covenantal relationship, the greater the responsibility in showing mercy.

sending him on his way. First, indiscriminately handing out money is always unwise. It often does more harm than good since the money is not always used wisely and it perpetuates a sense of inferiority and dependence. Additionally, it ignores the priority of the soul over the body, it ignores the priority of sharing the gospel over ministering to physical needs, it ignores our responsibility in discerning if he is a follower of Jesus or not, it ignores the command to not give toward those who are idle and lazy, and it ignores the command towards family to care for him first.

A better approach in the same situation would be to say, “I can’t offer you money, but I’d like to hear more about how I can help.” One could then proceed to ask about his life, how long the problem has existed, what he has done about it, how he found his way to the church building, and if he has family who is able to help. The opportunity may arise to talk about Jesus, to take his information and perhaps talk more later, or to direct him to organizations that specialize in areas the church does not. If the man is able-bodied and truly in need, a small job may be in order by which he can earn some money. If he is truly needy, he will welcome the opportunity to work to provide for himself, even in the smallest of cases. Our service must not make it easier for someone to continue in disobedience to God, nor should it make people more selfish. Rather, we must serve with such wisdom and love that they become more merciful themselves!

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## 7. Partner-driven ministries over other ministries

We truly believe that ministry should be driven by the individual members of the body. We take Ephesians 4 very seriously:

Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift...And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...(7, 11).

Certain members of the church are, by God’s grace, given leadership gifts that they might equip and lead all of the members to pour out their lives for others. Unfortunately, we live in a time when church leaders are the only ones considered to be “in the ministry” (after all, they are the “professionals!”) and the job of everyone else is merely to support their work financially. Furthermore, a ministry generally equals a church program that has been initiated by the professionals, is staffed with professionals, and is led by professionals. We lament the way in which ministry has been professionalized. We are all ministers (2 Cor. 5:18-20), and those entrusted to lead the church must not take ministry out of the hands of the people. Leaders must “equip the saints for the work of ministry,” not do it for them.

Therefore, we prefer ministry that is bottom-up rather than top-down. That is, we expect our partners to be involved in a wide variety of good works (Pr. 19:17; 21:3; Lk. 10:25-37; Acts 9:36; Heb. 13:1-3; Jas. 1:27), and through both their grassroots efforts and their involvement with existing para-church ministries and organizations, we continually celebrate and encourage the ministry that is being done. Some of this work we may choose to hold up as examples to our people, though without leading the church as a whole to own or support those particular ministries (whether by funding or staffing them). This bottom-up approach looks to individuals

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<sup>49</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 96.

within our church to be the impetus behind ministry of all kinds and allows for the natural interests and passions of our people to flourish.<sup>50</sup>

In some cases, many of our people may be drawn to a particular area of ministry (e.g. families affected by HIV/AIDS or sexually exploited children) or organization (e.g. Compassion International or Union Gospel Mission). If and when the collective “spirit” of our church is directed toward a particular ministry, it then becomes a viable option for the church to collectively fund this ministry and to create deacon positions to oversee and manage it. It may even be permissible to create a staff position when the ministry is unable to be managed by volunteers alone (all of whom work full time in or out of the home).

As a body, then, our priority will be to support the ministries in which our people are involved. If an individual or group of people at the Rooted would like the elders to consider leading the church to corporately support and give towards a ministry in which they are involved, they should complete two steps.

- First, they need to be partners of The Rooted Church. This is the primary way we identify those who are committed to the Rooted, who agree to live and and teach in a way that we believe honors Jesus, and who have made themselves accountable to the Rooted body and it’s leadership.
- Second, they must complete an Application for Ministry Support in which they present to the elders a detailed proposal explaining the vision, structure, methodology, etc. of the ministry as well as their plans for continued involvement.<sup>51</sup> All applications will be decided on by the elders. If, over the course of time, a ministry no longer has Rooted partners involved, the church may withdraw its support in favor of other partner-driven ministries.

Because the local church is entrusted by God to be a pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), a display of his glory and wisdom (Eph. 3:10), a representative of Jesus and his gospel at all times (remember, many organizations work to alleviate material poverty – only the Church and its members labor to proclaim the gospel!), we will not corporately endorse or fund an organization that does not strive to proclaim the biblical, historical, evangelical message of the gospel. We recognize that individual Christians may rightfully serve in these organizations and use personal relationships to share the gospel, but the church itself must not align itself with any entity that carries as its purpose anything less than the proclamation of our glorious Savior and King Jesus Christ.

### **8. Near Southside over other areas**

As a single church in a city of over 700,000, we must focus our efforts if we are to be effective. Just as it is more fruitful to jump headlong into a single ministry than it is to dip our toe into dozens of different ones, it is more effective to pour our lives out in service to a particular area than to an entire Metroplex. This is one of the reasons The Rooted Church has made a lifelong commitment to the area of Fort Worth known as Near Southside.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, our priority in

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<sup>50</sup> This is in contrast to a top-down approach in which church leadership creates ministries and recruits volunteers to serve.

<sup>51</sup> The Application for Ministry Support may be obtained from one of our pastors.

<sup>52</sup> The general boundaries of the area to which we’ve committed are I-30 to the north, I-35 to the east, 8th Avenue to the west, and Page Avenue to the south. It includes the Near Southside district, the Fairmount Historical district, and the majority of the hospital/ medical district. It encompasses the western half of the 76104 zip code and the northeast portion of the 76110 zip code.

regards to support and funding will go toward ministries in which our partners are involved within this part of our city.

Beyond Near Southside, our second priority is towards ministries to the city of Fort Worth (where we live and have relationships) before ministry to other areas of the country. Internationally, the Rooted aims to support and strengthen the ministries of missionaries and churches in a particular country so that we might encourage and enjoy the work of the gospel in other parts of the world. While this international involvement necessarily requires more top-down leadership, our involvement will stem from the natural connections and passions of our partners. The details of our international involvement is beyond the scope of this paper and will be addressed in subsequent writings.

## Conclusion

We don't claim to have all of this figured out. Poverty is a massive and complex issue that will always be with us this side of Jesus' return (Mt. 26:11). In all our efforts to alleviate poverty, we continually remember James 1:5,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

We trust God, his word, and his Spirit to guide our efforts and to change our hearts so that we might boldly and joyfully bring King Jesus – a King who is rescuing and renewing us – to as many people as possible.

Christ wins our salvation through losing, achieves power through weakness and service, and comes to wealth through giving all away. Those who receive his salvation are not the strong and accomplished but those who admit they are weak and lost. We cannot look at the poor and the oppressed and callously call them to pull themselves out of their own difficulty. Jesus did not treat us that way.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Gospel Coalition, "Theological Vision for Ministry", section V.5. <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/vision/>.

## Appendix: Scripture Passages on Serving the Poor

**Leviticus 19:18** “You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

**Leviticus 19:33-34** “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

**Deuteronomy 15:7** “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, ‘The seventh year, the year of release is near,’ and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’”

**Psalms 10:17-18** “O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed.”

**Psalms 82:3-4** “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

**Proverbs 14:31** “Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.”

**Proverbs 19:17** “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.”

**Isaiah 1:16-17** “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.”

**Isaiah 11:4** “With righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.”

**Isaiah 58:6-10** “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps 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 him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness 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, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.”

**Isaiah 61:1** “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”

**Jeremiah 21:12** “Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed.”

**Amos 2:6-7** “Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted...”

**Amos 5:21-24** “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I

will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

**Micah 6:8** “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

**Matthew 14:23** “He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.”

**Matthew 20:26-28** “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Matthew 25:34-46** “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. 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, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ 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.’

“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. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 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.’ 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?’ 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.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

**Luke 6:26-27** “Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”

**Luke 6:29-35** “To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

**Luke 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. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

**Acts 2:44-46** “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.”

**Acts 4:32, 34-35** “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common...There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. “

**Romans 12:10, 13, 16, 21** “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor... Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality...associate with the lowly...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

**Romans 15:25-27** “At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.”

**2 Corinthians 8:9** “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

**2 Corinthians 8:14-15** “Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

**2 Corinthians 9:6-8** “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, ‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’”

**2 Corinthians 9:12-15** “For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”

**Galatians 2:10** “Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.”

**Galatians 6:9-10** “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

**1 Thessalonians 3:12** “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.”

**1 Timothy 5:3,16** “Honor widows who are truly widows...Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.”

**1 Timothy 5:8** “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

**1 Timothy 6:6-10** “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 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. 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.”

**1 Timothy 6:17-19** “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. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”

**Hebrews 13:1-3** “Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”

**Hebrews 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.’”

**Hebrews 13:13-14, 16** “Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come...Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

**James 1:27** “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

**James 2:5-6** “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? But you have dishonored the poor man.”

**James 2:15-16** “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?”

**1 Peter 2:12** “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

**1 Peter 4:9-10** “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace”

**1 John 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? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”