

Whether we're going to another country or we're going to the gas station – we live on mission. You read the Bible- specifically Matthew 28- and realize that a Church that isn't on mission is disobedient. And huge part of our mission's instructions? Caring for the poor. It's a major part of our Biblical job description.

**Deuteronomy 15:4** God tells Israel – “*There should be no poor among you.*”  
It says of God's new testament people- the church- in **Acts 4:34** –  
“*There were no needy persons among them.*”

Caring for the poor is a part of our Biblical job *description*.  
But to do it well we need a Biblical *definition*.

In this series we've reflected on **Proverbs 18:21** again and again: ***words can bring death or life!***  
We often make this verse about the totality of our words and what comes out of our mouth.  
It's also certainly true of God's Word.  
But what about *each* word?

The definitions of words can derail our practice if they are shallow or incomplete.  
For instance how we see poverty – it effects our stewardship how we manage our blessings.  
It effects our generosity – whether and how we use our blessings to be a blessing.

We're on mission. We're called to reach the poor.  
But to do that well we have to understand ourselves. We have to understand our culture.

*Am I rich or poor? Are we rich? Or are we poor?*  
The answer? **Yes.**  
We're rich. And we're poor.

### **“Voices of the Poor”**

The World Bank asked 60k people from 60 different countries - “***What is poverty?***”  
The answers - *Inferiority. Shame. Low self-esteem. Alienation. Loneliness. Lack of contact.*  
They spoke of poverty in overwhelmingly **PSYCHOLOGICAL** and **SOCIAL** terms.  
A conditioned hopelessness, helplessness, and loneliness.

In our culture we think of poverty as primarily and overwhelmingly ***a lack of material things***.  
Food, income, healthcare, wealth, clean water, housing, etc.

Material lack and material poverty is very real. It should be ministered to. But it's a symptom.  
A symptom of something deeply rooted. Something that is psychological, relational, and spiritual.  
We have to get the diagnosis right, or what we prescribe and how we help will fail. Even hurt.

That's why before every trip to the DR I take the team through this book : ***When Helping Hurts***.  
The book teaches how the Bible shows us that God is fundamentally **relational**.  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit eternally **relational**.  
The Bible teaches us that God then made human beings are made in his image - we are wired for **relationship**.

#### 4 Primary Relationships

With **GOD** - Bring honor and glory to God in all we do.

**SELF** - we have inherent value as creations of God.

**OTHERS** - to love others as we love ourselves.

**CREATION** - we steward and manage creation on behalf of God. It involves preserving, protecting, and developing potential in God's good creation.

Now there wasn't a dime in all of Eden. No currency or money.

Yet at the fall, poverty broke into the world; a lack of the one thing we were created for above all else – relationship.

What does this poverty look like?

*Poverty with God* – idolatry as we worship other things and keep away from God out of fear.

*Poverty of being* - Low self-esteem SHAME. A high self esteem and pride.

*Poverty of community* - self centeredness & exploitation of others. Fail to see ImagoDei in others

*Poverty of stewardship* - Laziness and loss of purpose.

When these relationships are broken, our cultures and systems are broken as well.

Sin isn't just a personal issue. It becomes a systemic one with systemic issues.

Poverty becomes a symptom of the real problem... broken relationship.

Where the Fall of Man in Genesis fractured these relationships.

The Gospel is all about reconciling them.

The end game is not to turn the poor into people with more material accumulation and assets, as the middle and upper class of America has proven to be marked by high rates of divorce, sexual addiction, mental illness, and substance abuse. Our materially rich culture results in a poverty of relationship... in terms of the 4 relationships:

**GOD** - We deny God's existence or acts as though he's irrelevant. Forget him.

We may deny that's us but live as Christian Atheists... *we believe in God but don't pray, we believe in God but don't pursue Him through his word or his Church, we believe in God but we trust more in money...*

**CREATION** - Known for being workaholics. (As much a sin as laziness)

**OTHER** - Self centered- Individualistic. Don't know the name of the person across the street.

**SELF**- not a marred self image but superiority - a god complex.

- We think more of ourselves than we should rather than less.

This is how I could say in the opening that we are both rich and poor.

We may have two cars and have enough food to feed our family, but we experience poverty in the other direction - **“Am I so poor that all I have are my possessions?”**

We have to elevate our definition of poverty from the mere symptom to the Biblical definition. Our consideration of poverty affects the way we see ourselves, our wealth, our world, and even our worship.

Jesus says after his encounter with the Rich Young Ruler:

***“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter Heaven.”***

I’m not sure there’s another verse in the Bible that gives me so much pause.

The path is already narrow...

Now wealth is bad too?

***Is it OK to be rich?***

You start reading the Bible from cover to cover...there are plenty of evil rich people in the Bible. Pharaohs, kings, queens, and alike. For many of them their streak of evil actions was fueled and funded by their wealth and status.

Clichés flow like water... *“well you know what they say”*

*Power corrupts...*

*Money is the root of all evil...*

Yet we see there are evil poor in scripture.

Proverbs speak about these types again and again.

***Should Christians be rich or poor?***

That’s not the right question. And it’s why the Bible doesn’t answer it.

The question is at the heart of the Bible – and we apply it to our wealth – should the Christian be holy or unholy?

Crucial to our understanding of the law handed down in the OT and the rest of the Bible is the command at the heart of Leviticus - ***“Be holy, as I am holy.”***

***Should Christians be rich or poor?***

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**Holy Poor – Joseph** – Jesus’ dad.

**Holy Rich – Joseph of Arimathea** – Matthew describes him as a wealthy man.

Jesus himself was both among the holy rich and the holy poor.

**2 Corinthians 8:9**

Jesus was rich into eternity past. He’s rich into eternity future. Yet he is perfectly holy.

Then Jesus came to live in poverty on Earth. Yet he was perfectly holy.

***The question the Bible stresses isn’t should we be rich or poor.***

***The question the Bible cares about is should we look like Jesus.*** The answer is always yes.

Whichever Joseph we identify with, we’re called to look like Jesus.

Most of us are Joseph of Arimathea. We are rich...

A United Nations report in 2008 showed that the average American lives on \$90 per day.

Approximately 1 billion people live on under a dollar a day.

40% of the world population - 2.6 billion people- live on less than \$2 a day.

That shouldn't spark guilt. But it should spark awareness. We're materially wealthy.

And it should give us pause. Jesus himself said there's a camel sized blockade on the needle sized entrance to Heaven for the rich...

How do we walk as both rich and holy and not fall into the trap laid out for us?

Paul gives us the recipe in 1 Timothy 6 that ends with the rich "*experiencing true life.*"

### **READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10**

*Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.*

*But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.*

*"The **LOVE** of money is the root of all **KINDS OF** evil."*

Many will point to this wording and say "look, I don't need to sweat having money." Money itself isn't evil. It's the love of money. But let's be honest - who doesn't love money? Who doesn't love the things it gets us?

The deception of the enemy isn't a mouse trap that snaps in an instant.

Paul says that those that love their wealth "**wander**" from the true faith. They drift unwittingly.

Look at some common sins, and we realize that greed and materialism is different because it hides itself. It blinds us to its presence.

Nobody has ever confessed to me - "I'm greedy."

And as we've seen in the four relationships, and as we see in our culture - the love of money impoverishes.

Dom Helder Camara - "*I used to think, when I was a child, that Christ might have been exaggerating when he warned about the dangers of wealth. Today I know better. I know how very hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of human kindness...*"

Truths Paul gives Timothy that help us remove the camel and step into true wealth - or as Paul puts it in one translation - "*the life that is truly life*" - *eternal life*.

And it's not just a truth he gives Timothy.

It's a command Timothy is to give to the wealthy. (vs. 17 in the NIV)

It's a command in scripture for us. The world's wealthy.

## **READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19**

### **GOD IS RELIABLE**

Money is unreliable. Don't trust in wealth.  
Instead? Trust in God. God is reliable.

**Great Depression**, the day of the market crash in 1929, the # of rumored suicides was astronomical. But interestingly enough, as the "Great Depression" lasted into the 1930s and people lived with far less, suicide rates actually went down below the standard norm. Less money, less problems? There was now room for non-material, eternal investment... What Paul would call the life that is truly life.

#### **Luke 12:19-30**

*"And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs."*

What happens when your thoughts are no longer dominated by your needs because you're trusting in a reliable God? You can be his hands and feet. You can instead look to the needs of others.

To trust God to provide is to trust him enough to live generously.

### **WHAT YOU HAVE IS WHAT GOD HAS RICHLY GIVEN**

*"We brought nothing with us when we came into this world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it."*

In between is what we receive by grace. God *"richly gives us all we need for enjoyment."*

**ENTITLEMENT** says yes, I brought nothing into this world, and what I've got, I earned.  
*"I've earned it and I deserve it."*

But this flies in the face of the reality of a verse like **Psalm 24:1** –

*"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.  
The world and all its people belong to Him."*

**Deuteronomy 8:18** –*remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.*

We are blessed. Richly blessed. Now what?

## THE TASK IS STEWARDSHIP

The Bible wants you to be rich: ***“Rich on good deeds. Generous and willing to share.”***

**Steward** –One put in charge of the entire estate in the master’s absence.

A steward is a representative who reflects the heart & character of the one who put the items in their possession.

**Luke 12:42** Jesus is teaching from a parable when he says -

*...And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise **steward**, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to **give** them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his master will find so doing when he comes...*

Blessed is the steward who is found doing what? **Giving.**

Stewards aren't stingy!

In my life I’ve sometimes viewed responsible stewardship as being tight fisted with resources. Erring on the side of caution rather than risk. After all it’s not yours, your just a steward.

But a steward should reflect the heart of the one who they represent.

We’re called to live generous as God is generous.

Sometimes we pit stewardship against generosity.

As if being a responsible steward of resources negates it.

***If you’re a responsible steward you will live a life of radical generosity!***

**When our caring for our blessings eclipses our caring for people we’ve started “drifting from the faith.”**

Caring for others and caring for the poor is a part of our job description.

We opened looking at **Deuteronomy 15:4** and **Acts 4:34**

You also look at Paul’s account of his first meeting with the apostles in Galatians.

Peter, James and John approve of Paul’s message and ministry and give him the green light but out of all things they could have singled out they give him a single command in GAL 2:10:

***“that we keep helping the poor, which I have always been eager to do.”***

Could it be that the fact this was at the heart of the early church is why the early church exploded with growth?

**Isaiah 58:10** promises and prophecies:

*If you spend yourself on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,  
Then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*

Want revival? Follow Paul’s command to be rich in good deeds and give generously.

Right now in America 1 in 4 Church going Christians doesn’t give a dime annually. To anything.

We’re a rich people living in a rich culture that have drifted from our call to be rich in giving.

But it’s not all about giving materially or money.

Again – material poverty is a symptom.

## THE GREATEST GIFT IS RELATIONSHIP

Paul speaks to the “life that is truly life.” Jesus declared he came to give life and life in abundance. Then he defines it’s pinnacle – eternal life – in **John 17:3** - *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Life is about relationship.  
First vertically with God. And horizontally with others.  
Relationship. Connection. Caring. Compassion.

That’s the greatest gift we’ve received. And that’s the gift we’re called to give.

Are you rich or poor?  
But how are you relationally?

*Poverty with God* – idolatry as we keep away from God out of fear. Or simply living like a functional atheist, we all but forget about him.

*Poverty of community* - Self centeredness & fractured relationships.

*Poverty of stewardship* - Laziness and loss of purpose. Or you’re a workaholic that’s forsaken rest.

*Poverty of being* - Low self-esteem and shame. Or pride and entitlement.

Let us not be a people that are so poor that all we have is our money.  
Let us be a people that looks like Christ whether we have little or much.