

Matthew 25: 34 – 40 “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that 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 something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me’ ...’Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”ⁱ

INTRODUCTION:

Most Christians are quite well acquainted with the verse above, and it is quite often cited in matters pertaining to those living in poverty. The truth is that this verse is one among many strewn throughout the Bible, calling us to care for one another. It is a core value of Christianity; it is time to bring it to the forefront. God’s children are being dragged into the ranks of the impoverished; the gap between the affluent and those who are barely making ends meet is widening; resources needed to remedy the problem are growing scarce, yet so many still do not know the depth and breadth of poverty.

Did You Know...?

There are 2.2 billion children in the world; 1 billion of those children live in poverty.ⁱⁱ

At least 80% of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day, and more than 80% of the world’s population lives in countries where income differentials are widening. The wealthiest nation on Earth has the widest such gap between rich and poor of any industrialized nation.ⁱⁱⁱ

The poorest 40 percent of the world’s population accounts for 5 percent of global income, while the richest 20 percent accounts for three-quarters of world income. For every \$1 in aid a developing country receives, over \$25 is spent on debt repayment.^{iv}

WHAT CAUSES POVERTY? ^v

- **Health Issues:** Health issues range from widespread diseases and illnesses, and insufficient maternal and child health to lack of water and sanitation that compound or cause the ailments. Health issues keep populations from being able to work, hindering economic growth.
- **Economic Issues:** Economic Issues include: trade barriers, lack of development assistance, debt and inefficient aid. Trade barriers often force countries to be more reliant on development assistance, which is often inefficient and insufficient to counteract the debt already incurred.
- **Environmental Conditions:** Environmental conditions that compound poverty include: climate change and agricultural limitations. Agricultural limitations are primarily cause by the lack of: investment, resources, tools, fertilization, seeds and water. Meanwhile, climate change is causing both droughts and floods, which only further limits agricultural yields, and thus also limits adequate nutrition.
- **Lack of Education:** Education is cyclical in both directions. Education provides upward mobility for the individual, as well as the community, which

in turn is able to provide greater education. Lack of education begets poverty, which begets lack of education.

- **Inadequate Governance and Security:** Unfortunately, corruption still plays a role in many governments, thus resources that should aid the public might never reach them. In addition, lack of security forces, or corrupt security forces, often make chores as simple as walking to retrieve water, a dangerous task.

HOW IS POVERTY MEASURED?

Analysts often use the terms “absolute” and “relative” poverty thresholds. Absolute thresholds are fixed at a point in time and updated solely for price changes. Relative thresholds, in contrast, are updated regularly (usually, annually) for changes in real consumption. Relative poverty thresholds are proposed by several organizations, and each contains subtle variations in measurement. There are two main absolute poverty measures used today. The World Bank utilizes an absolute poverty threshold that is set at 1 USD per day, which classifies extreme poverty, and 2 USD per day, which classifies moderate poverty.^{vi} The United States currently uses an absolute poverty threshold known as the Federal Poverty Measure.^{vii}

What is the Federal Poverty Measure?

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced his War on Poverty. In order to address poverty, the government needed to delineate those who needed assistance. This led to the development of the Federal Poverty Measure. At the time, the Department of Agriculture had established that families spent about one third of their after-tax income on food. Thus, the economy food plan was multiplied by three to establish the poverty threshold. This was then slightly adjusted to allow for variance in family size, gender of the family head, number of children under 18 years of age, and whether or not the family lived on a farm.

Why does the Federal Poverty Measure need to be changed?

It no longer accurately reflects those who are and are not impoverished. The multiplication of three has no relevance, as families now only spend one seventh of their after-tax income on food. Moreover, the measure does not add in income for assistance such as: food stamps, school lunches, public housing...etc. Likewise, it does not subtract from gross income costs of basic needs such as: income taxes, child-support payments, medical costs, health-insurance premiums, childcare...etc. Some say it overestimates poverty; some say it underestimates poverty. Either way, all agree that it must be fixed before we can address poverty.

ADDRESSING POVERTY

How can YOU address poverty?

- Contact your congressional representatives and express to them the importance of caring for people living in impoverished situations as an issue of faith.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen

- Buy products from organizations that help alleviate poverty, such as buying fair trade
- Sponsor a child in a foreign country
- Have a monthly garage sale and donate the proceeds
- 6 Actions you can take **today**:
 - o Go through your closet and take out clothes that you rarely wear or no longer fit; donate them.
 - o Make mini care packages. Include: a bottle of water, a snack (something non-perishable that can be left in car), a bus ticket, and directions to a local homeless shelter. Put these in your car and give them out when you come across a homeless person.
 - o Look through your planner/calendar and find a day (weekly or monthly) that you can commit to doing some volunteer work.
 - o Research what your city does for poverty; it may give you more ideas of ways to help, and where to volunteer.
 - o Call your church and find out what your congregation is doing to alleviate poverty.
 - o Go to our website to find more information on poverty and more ideas for ways you can help.

How can your congregation address poverty?

- Hold a letter writing campaign to your congressional representatives on issues relating to poverty.
- Buy fair trade refreshments for times of fellowship.
- Have a church wide clothing/canned food drive
- Host a church wide garage sale, wherein the proceeds are donated to poverty alleviation programs.
- Volunteer as a congregation in a soup kitchen, or start your congregation's very own soup kitchen.
- Have a dedicated offering for poverty.

There are, of course, several local programs to help those in your community. Making a difference in one person's life is an incredible blessing from God. However, if we focus on the overarching systematic problems and solutions, we can make a difference in the lives of millions. This was the inspiration for this final suggestion:

How can the United States Government Address Poverty?

Federal Budget:

The Federal budget is, at its core, a document which symbolizes the moral foundations of our country, and that provides great opportunity to help and support equal opportunity and care for the least of these.

More specifically, the Federal Budget is a blueprint first drafted by the President and revised by Congress, which outlines how much money the government will take in as revenue, and how much it will spend.

There are three types of spending: tax spending, mandatory spending, and discretionary spending. There are some programs under the umbrella of mandatory spending such as: Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid, Food Stamps, SCHIP, etc. These programs address the overarching precursors to rising out of poverty such as: education, affordable healthcare, and housing assistance. Mandatory spending is precisely that – mandatory. However, discretionary spending can be (and is often) cut back.

Appropriations:

Unfortunately, even if a budget is passed with generous amounts of money allotted to discretionary spending, there are many programs that fall under that large umbrella. The money must then be designated through the appropriations process to various and sundry programs. This does not only impact domestic poverty, it also impacts the amount of aid designated to foreign countries.

How can you as a citizen hold the government accountable to addressing poverty?

We live in a representative democracy. Tell those whom you have elected what your priorities are. Tell them that social programs are imperative in order to provide opportunity for all of God’s children to support themselves, and do God’s work. This can be done on an individual basis or your congregation can have a letter writing party of sorts. Moreover, the church can draft a uniform post card, which members of the congregation can sign. Every February, make a point of getting your congregation’s letters to Congress before the President’s budget arrives, and continue to make your voices heard throughout the appropriations process.

BIBLE QUOTES ON POVERTY:

Deuteronomy 15:7 “If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor.”^{viii}

Deuteronomy 26:12 “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns,”^{ix}

Proverbs 14:31 “Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.”^x

Proverbs 19:17 “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full.”^{xi}

Proverbs 22:9 “Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.”^{xii}

Proverbs 31:8 – 9 “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”^{xiii}

Matthew 5:42 “Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.”^{xiv}

Matthew 19:20 “The young man said to him, ‘I have kept all these; what do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’”^{xv}

Luke 3:11 “In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’”^{xvi}

Luke 12:33 "Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys."^{xvii}

ⁱ 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

ⁱⁱ Sha, Anup. 2009. Poverty Facts and Stats. Global Issues.
<http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats> (accessed April 20th, 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱ Sha, Anup. 2009. Poverty Facts and Stats. Global Issues.
<http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats> (accessed April 20th, 2009).

^{iv} Sha, Anup. 2009. Poverty Facts and Stats. Global Issues.
<http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats> (accessed April 20th, 2009).

^v 2009. ONE. <http://www.one.org/us/issues/> (accessed April 15th, 2009).

^{vi} 2009. PovertyNet. The World Bank.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,menuPK:336998~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:336992,00.html>
(accessed April 15th, 2009).

^{vii} 2009. United States Department of Health and Human Services.
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/08Poverty.shtml> (accessed April 15th, 2009).

^{viii} 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

^{ix} 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

^x 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

^{xi} 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

^{xii} 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

^{xiii} 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

^{xiv} 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

^{xv} 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

^{xvi} 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.

^{xvii} 1989. The New Revised Standard Version Bible. California: HarperOne.