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Open Your Eyes, They're Crying

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Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs



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Open Your Eyes, They're Crying

I have a request for you to consider. I have the name of a family who has some needs; a family that I need someone to spend some quality time with this next week. Some of their needs are spiritual; some of their needs are physical. Without violating any confidences, I can tell you a little bit about them and their needs, so you can decide whether or not you feel inclined to volunteer.

The man's name is Danny. His wife's name is Paula. I can't ask someone to go simply because they live nearby. I looked in the church directory, and nobody in our fellowship even lives in the same zip code. But Danny and Paula are in big trouble. I am not sure whether or not either of them is a Christian, but they are having some other problems that are so engulfing them that it's difficult to get their attention right now to share spiritual truth. That is our goal—that's why God brought them across our path—but until they know we love them, I doubt if they will listen to what we have to say.

I visited Danny and Paula this week. They have no electricity. It was cut off because they couldn't pay the bill. The only food they had was a stale loaf of bread, and it was covered with ants and mold. There was no chair to sit in. They had one table and a bed. There are six of them living in one room. Danny has a progressive disease and is no longer able to work. Paula was laid off from her job because of the recession. Three of the four children living at home were there when I went. They were all dirty, and the stench made it difficult to breathe. There was no air conditioning, and the heat was unbearable. This is Danny's third marriage; Paula's fourth. They have no Bible, and neither of them has ever read so much as one chapter of Scripture in their entire lifetime. I must warn you, the house is infested with roaches and rats. As you can see, this family has a good many needs.

What I want someone to do, is invest their life in Danny and

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Paula and their four children. Spend time with them. Help Paula find a job. Help Danny get physical therapy. Be sure the kids are back in school. Get some friends to help fight the roaches and rats. They don't have a car, so I want someone to bring them to church so they can visit our fellowship.

Now I would venture to guess that some of you are not as eager to volunteer for this assignment as you were two minutes ago. You may be saying to yourself. "I just couldn't identify with people like that." or "I have a weak stomach, I don't think I could do that" or "Why doesn't the church just send them some money so they can pay their bills and solve their problems?" Well, we have some money to help, but can't you just see Jesus mailing them a check? Or forming a committee? I don't think so.

I think the Jesus we know would go see Danny and Paula Himself. I think He would walk into all that filth and stench and He would see a man, a woman and four children who needed help and who needed Him. I think Jesus would ignore the roaches and the rats and pick up those smelly children and hug them like they were His own. I think He would take them to the grocery store and see that they had food to eat. I think He would offer to take Paula to look for a job. I think He would see that the kids had someone to look after them. He might call you and ask you to help. I think Jesus would so identify with their needs that the sheer magnetism of His love would overwhelm them. Then I think Jesus would sit them down and tell them Who Love really Is.

The sad part is, I think Jesus expects us to do the same thing. He is saying, Go, my children, and when you have so given yourselves to the least of these my brethren, the most insignificant, the most pitiful, the most afflicted; when you have given your lives away to the likes of them, then you have given your lives away to Me!

Now Danny and Paula happen to be a hypothetical family. They stand for Danny Destitute and Paula Poverty. And I played a little trick on you. I really don't have a family for you to visit today. But Danny and Paula though hypothetical, are not imaginary. There are millions of them living in every corner of the world. In some countries they represent the majority. There are thousands, literally thousands in this city whose homes are no better than theirs; and whose plight is no different. And we

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evangelical Christians, living in the air conditioned comfort of upper middle class American Christianity, are for the most part, are afraid to be so much as touched by them, let alone let our lives touch theirs.

It wasn't Bell Telephone who originated the thought "Reach out and touch someone". It was Jesus Christ. And when He says "touch" He does not mean drop off a casserole and roll on. He does not mean mail a check to save your neck. He does not mean make a call but that is all. He means pour your life into their life. If they are hurting, hurt. If they are grieving, grieve. If they are lonely, stay there. If they are hungry, feed them. If they are naked, clothe them. If they are in Prison, visit them. If they are sick, help them.

Love them...no matter how dirty they are

Love them...no matter how ignorant they are

Love them...no matter how poor they are

Love them...no matter how ungrateful they are

Love them...no matter how crude they are

Love them...no matter how irreligious they are

Love them....let Jesus love them through you.

As you can see, we are treading unfamiliar and in some cases unpopular seas for many of us. We desire our Christian commitment to manifest itself in socially acceptable forms and in relatively comfortable ministries. We are willing to support missionaries who go to the starving in Central America or the destitute in Africa. We'll even sit through a slide presentation, so long as it isn't too stark or too realistic. After all, we don't want nightmares.

But, Beloved, the sending of dollars nowhere in Scripture is a substitute for the giving of a life. We are called on to do both. And some of the people we are called on to give our lives to simply do not feel comfortable in our zip codes and we won't feel comfortable in theirs.

The problem is we have a new mailing address. It's called Number One Eternity Place and there, God plans to move His whole family into ONE ZIP CODE! Danny and Paula, should they come to know Christ as Savior will one day be our neighbors. So Jesus is saying "you'd better pay attention to the story of the

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Good Samaritan and learn who your neighbor is. It's anyone who has a need."

So we come to lesson two of this somewhat painful process of perusing proverbs to pursue the principle of Learning to Give Your Life Away. In the last message, we asked the question "Where Has All the Love Gone?" And by looking at John chapter three and Luke chapter nine among others, we determined that the love has for one thing, gone the way of inadequate definition. We have re-defined love, a la Satan, to be a "feeling"; although Jesus clearly demonstrated that love is giving. It is giving yourself away without reservation, even for those who have done nothing to deserve your love—even for those who have nothing to give in return.

We asked ourselves "Where has all the love gone?" and we determined to look through the pages of Proverbs for some answers. The outline of this lesson is

- I- Where Has All the Love Gone?
 - A- the problem in perspective
 - B- the enemy's extremes
- II- Where Does All the Love Go?
 - A- Proverbs: the shadow of a broken heart
 - B- Defining the downtrodden
 - C- Open your eyes, they are crying

The first part of this lesson is only a reminder of the issue from the broader perspective of the Body of Christ at large. It is getting the problem in perspective.

Its purpose is to see that the Christian Church if it is to address the issue of the down trodden, must ever be careful to seek the balance and not fall prey to the enemy's extremes.

The problem is this: the Church's primary mission is spiritual. And man's basic needs are spiritual. That we must never forget! But the flip side is this: Man *thinks* his needs are physical, and he lives in a very physical world.

God's promises, likewise, are mostly spiritual promises of a spiritual kingdom. God's children are called upon to live in a physical world amidst a conflict on their way to a spiritual world where peace and prosperity will be realized at last. Because of

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the fall, living in this world will never be easy. There will be war, hate, poverty, disease, rejection, and persecution so long as Satan is free to walk to and fro upon the whole earth, seeking whom he may devour. We are involved in a full-scale war on our way to a land of peace.

The poor we will always have with us. That's a promise.

There will be wars and rumors of wars. That's a promise.

"They hated me," Jesus said, "they will hate you." That's a promise.

The Church's mission is to demonstrate spiritual reality in the midst of physical chaos... and as the day draws nearer when Satan and all his hosts will be cast forever into the lake of fire, the intensity of the battle can do nothing but heighten. He's on the ropes! He's down for the count of nine! It may not look like it, but you and I have read the final chapter of the Book and we know that just ahead on the horizon there lies an epoch conflict between the armies of God and the godless armies of men that will turn the eyes of all mankind back to tiny Israel where the King will come once again, and once for all and once for always, settle the issue of who is God.

In the meantime, the Church has been commissioned to walk in Jesus' footsteps, led by His Spirit. He is the Bread of Life and the Living Water. What He has to give man is spiritual and lasts forever, but He knows, and we know from watching Him on earth, that in order to communicate spiritual truth in a physical world, there are some physical needs that have to be met.

He fed the multitudes, not because that was His primary ministry, but because there is a limit to man's capacity to receive spiritual truth on an empty stomach, and because unless man could believe God cared enough to feed him loaves and fishes, at least some struggled with Living Water and Manna come down from Heaven. His mission was spiritual, but part of His plan was to meet physical needs in order to demonstrate His love and in order to get man's attention long enough to show him that man "does not live by bread alone."

The church through the ages has struggled with that truth and has vacillated from generation to generation from one extreme to the other. Satan knows that if he can just destroy the balance, he can blur the distinctives that make the church's

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message desirable to people with spiritual needs who live in a very physical world.

On the one hand, Satan knows that the church's mission is a spiritual mission, but he also knows that if in its quest for spiritual treasures and spiritual pleasures it becomes inbred, self-centered, and self-serving, all that spiritual knowledge will only encase the church in a crust of self-righteousness and insulate it from the real needs of a real world. So Satan has tried to turn the Bible-believing, evangelical church into a reservoir—a reservoir whose primary objective is to learn doctrine until doctrine becomes a god. Instead of meeting the needs of a lost world, knowledge becomes an end within itself. It insulates itself from the needy, the poor, the rebellious, even from the rest of Christianity in order to protect its own purity. Slowly, its self-righteousness becomes exclusive, divisive, and finally self-destructive. It becomes the victim of spiritual self-indulgence, until seeing itself as an end within itself, it pours for itself a concrete foundation and builds a church but forgets to cut doors and windows to let the message out.

At the other extreme is the Cathedral of Social Concern. With the right motives and a scriptural admonition to help the poor, it forgets that its real objectives are spiritual and pours its energy into social activities to the exclusion of spiritual growth and genuine evangelism. Instead of a reservoir it becomes a vacuum, giving away something it does not have, pursuing physical objectives without spiritual purpose or power.

The result is, that in an effort to meet needs, it slowly forgets why it's there. Soon it defies absolutes, loses spiritual power, becomes self-glorifying, and whereas in the former case, doctrine became a god, in the latter, works become a god. The church becomes an activity center, doing good things—in God's name—but without God's power—power that can only come when the mind is being renewed by the Spirit through the Word.

But I believe in the center there is the New Testament Church in balance. It is not a reservoir. It is not a vacuum. It is a channel through which Jesus gives Himself away. Its first objective is always spiritual: to spiritually feed the saints so that they can do the work of the ministry, but its message is not self-indulgent. The reason it wants to be filled with Jesus is so that Jesus, through it, can give Himself away.

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Its objective is eternal life. Its mission field is the whole world. Its method is to so love. Being filled with the Spirit and armed with the Word, it gives itself away, not simply to those who comfortably fit into their Jerusalem. The balanced Church goes on to Samaria to touch the lives of those who are uncomfortably unacceptable by the world's standards.

Obviously there are variations along that spectrum, and obviously not every church has the exact same ministry. But every church has the same calling: to receive the Word with all readiness of mind, searching the scriptures daily, to go into all the world and preach the gospel, and in the process to touch the lives of angels unawares. Do unto the least of these and thus to do it unto Him.

Our objective is to keep the balance. So we turn to Proverbs, God's handbook of Principles for some answers, and we learn that although Proverbs is a sketch of how to give, the portrait does not glow in all its colors until it is overlaid upon the painting of a Cross on a Hillside and we can see how God gave Himself away.

But Proverbs does give us a glimpse into the heart of God, and what we see is the shadow of a broken heart. For though sin has infested His world and the result is pain and suffering, God while providing a spiritual solution, is not indifferent to our physical afflictions, and He will not allow His Children to become indifferent, either. What we see in Proverbs is that we belong to a God who cares.

He cares when we're hungry. He cares when we're lonely. He cares when we're sick. Even if our affliction is necessary to fulfill His will, and He must allow it to continue, He cares, and He hurts. He simply loves us enough to do what is best for us—not with calloused indifference but with sensitive love.

So in Proverbs He projected the reality of a caring Christian Community into the fiber of principles that have somehow been glossed over by the Bible-believing evangelical community and have often been misappropriated at the hands of a misdirected, though well-meaning, liberal church.

The people He builds His case around are a people He most often refers to as "*the poor*". But lest we draw an unscriptural conclusion, the poor He is referring to are not just those who

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have no money. They may well be included, and often are... But the Hebrew word used in most of these passages that is translated “poor” literally means *“those who for one reason or another find themselves the victims of injustice or circumstances that render them unable to compete on an equal footing or unable to enjoy equal benefits with the main stream of society.”* Literally translated, it means, “One who is low.”

Even the English dictionary knows the difference. It translates the word “poor” as those having little or no means of support; those who are needy; those lacking in some quality rendering them either a) inadequate, b) inferior or c) contemptible; those who are worthy of pity, considered unfortunate. The poor are all those who by virtue of circumstances are disadvantaged and unable to help themselves.

And as we wind our way through the poetic parenthetical phrases of proverbs it becomes plain that God uses such words as *“afflicted, weak, forlorn, and needy”* as synonyms for “poor”. He includes in His admonitions to meet their needs such people as widows, orphans, the sick, the jobless, the hungry, the crippled, the blind, the deaf, those who are emotionally or physically disabled or impaired, and those who because of race, size, or cultural or ethnic barriers have been the victims of discrimination. God understands discrimination. No people in history will ever suffer more at the hands of a prejudiced world than have His people, the Jews. But God understands. And He understands that the church was never intended to be a Christian Country Club overlooking a crumbling, chaotic, suffering society through a giant picture window, double insulated to prevent their hurts from destroying the view. God told the church to open its windows so the smell could come in; to open its doors so the Word could get out; and to open its heart so the love could be communicated to the poor, regardless of *why* they have become the Poor.

So for this study we have defined the downtrodden as “everyone and anyone who is by virtue of circumstances disadvantaged and unable to help themselves.” The most obvious are the penniless; but the blind, the lame, the prisoner, the lonely, the widow, the orphan—these, too, are the poor, and the principles we are about to study apply to each of them equally, so our task may be more complex than we originally envisioned.

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Now what is God saying to the Church about the “poor”? I never realized until I began this study how strongly God feels about the disadvantaged. I want to catalog for you five things God says the believer must not do where the disadvantaged are concerned.

First we'll list them and define them. Then we'll go to the Scripture and read the reasons and the results of violating those orders.

1- We must not “despise” them. The dictionary defines it this way:

Despise: to scorn, to refuse, to reject, to feel dislike or disgust, to consider with contempt.

One dictionary sums it up “to look down on”.

Proverbs 14 gives us God's perspective:

The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends.

He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy. (Proverbs 14:20,21 NIV)

The Living Bible capsulizes it this way

Even his own neighbors despise the poor man, while the rich have many ‘friends’. To despise the poor is sin. Blessed are those who pity them. (Proverbs 14:20,21 TLB)

God says to in any way discriminate in your mind against those who are less fortunate is sin. To look down upon, or feel contempt for the lame or the beggar or the impoverished violates the character of God. Remember, we're looking for principles. At this point, we're not even talking about giving to meet their needs, or getting involved in their lives. We're talking attitude; that's God's main concern, and God resists the Christian who looks on the less fortunate with contempt or disdain or disregard.

Now, beloved, this is a hard saying, this is tough meat. I don't know about you, but I know about me. One block from where I used to have my office was a blood bank where every morning at 6 am dozens of what you would call the “scum of the earth” would hang out just to sell enough blood to buy a meal or a drink or a fix.

They would spit on the sidewalk, smell like a garbage-dump,

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and were often obscene and abusive. I had to walk by them every morning, five days a week; and I didn't see them through the eyes of Jesus. Their behavior was repulsive so I saw them through eyes of contempt. I didn't want to get involved. Like the Priest and the Levite in Luke 10, I would cross over to the other side of the street to avoid having to speak to one of them, or share with one of them, or give to one of them. You see, they're not *my kind*. Now don't sit there with such smug condescension. What about you? When you are confronted with the downtrodden, do you want to stop and relate, or cross over and run? We must needs go through Samaria, too. But do we?

2- God tells us that we must not "oppress" the "poor" or downtrodden. The word "oppress" means "to subjugate or persecute by the unfair use of authority or power." In other words, it means to take advantage of their disadvantage!

Proverbs gives us God's perspective in pretty strong language. It says this:

He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

(Proverbs 14:31 NIV)

It means anytime you use another person's handicap to your advantage you are insulting God. It means God takes their condition *personally!* They are His, and they are His special concern because they are suffering. If you park in the handicapped zones of life... not just with your car but with your heart, God is offended.

You don't hire a widow or a lame man for less salary because they are desperate and you can get by with it. To do so is an insult to God. On the other hand, God says, you stop what you're doing and help them, go out of your way to see that they get a fair shake, and by so doing, you are honoring God!

Another form of oppression is partiality. We have this warning:

It is wrong to sentence the poor and let the rich go free."

(Proverbs 24:23 TLB)

Giving preferred treatment to rich people is a clear case of selling one's soul for a piece of bread. (Proverbs 28:21 TLB)

And it is doubly destructive when those who are downtrodden

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take out their frustrations by oppressing those who are even less fortunate than they are.

When a poor man oppresses those even poorer, he is like an unexpected flood sweeping away their last hope.

(Proverbs 28:3 TLB)

Oh, the sin of oppressing the poor or the handicapped; of using their wheelchairs or their empty stomachs as wedges to put them where they can become cheap labor or symbols to put on posters to use to get money for personal gain. God says it's not only them you're insulting; you're insulting *Me!* Reach out to them, God says, and you're, in essence, reaching out to me. you're honoring me, the God who champions the cause of the destitute, and comes to the rescue of the hurt and the hungry.

Do you see the patterns emerging? It isn't so much *what* we do; it's our basic philosophy concerning the have-nots and the helpless that God is looking at. Do you see that how you feel when you pass by that beggar means something to God? He takes either your condescension or your compassion very personally; and personally, I never realized that before.

3- God tells us, where the unfortunate are concerned, to never "mock" them.

To mock: "to treat with scorn; to ridicule or mimic in fun or derision."

Mocking is telling jokes about the blind, or the lame, or the poor, or the widow, or the ignorant. It is taking their affliction lightly; treating it as though it were not really a serious matter. It may not be to you, but it is to them, and it is to God.

He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.

(Proverbs 17:5 NIV)

The Living Bible really tells it like it is. It says

Mocking the poor is mocking the God who made them. He will punish those who rejoice at another's misfortunes.

(Proverbs 17:5 TLB)

You think that beggar is the makings of a joke? God doesn't! You think jesting about another's ignorance or about a retarded person's limitations makes for good humor? The God who made them doesn't see any humor in their affliction. And the God who

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made them lives in your heart. He in you doesn't see any humor in it either. Don't mock the poor or the afflicted; when you do, you are mocking their Creator, and He does not take lightly those who take lightly another's misfortunes.

Their grief is a source for your heartaches not for your humor. They are a basis for loving; not for laughing.

4- We are not to exploit the poor.

The word "exploit" means "*to take advantage of another's vulnerability*".

It goes one step beyond oppressing the poor. It is even worse than walking over them without regard; it is a deliberate ploy to take advantage of their weakness under the guise of charity. Proverbs says, "don't do it!"

Income from exploiting the poor will end up in the hands of
someone who pities them. (Proverbs 28:8)

In other words, you just think that business deal that takes from the poor to fill your pockets is a success. God has a scale of justice, and in due time, the profits you made profiting from another's misfortunes will be taken from you and given to one who will use them to meet the needs of those who hurt. Exploiting the poor may seem like a temporary nest-egg, but I wouldn't put it in the bank and bank on it. It's a short-cut to bankruptcy, according to Proverbs.

The fifth and last thing in Proverbs we are commanded not to do where the poor are concerned is perhaps the one that affects most of us. We're not to despise them, oppress them, mock them, or exploit them. I think most of us can rationalize ourselves through those verbs—but ah, the last one, more difficult to ignore it is.

5- We're not to ignore them!

TO IGNORE: to disregard, to pay no attention to; to walk around or walk away from.

There's the clincher. And there is more than one way to ignore them, according to Proverbs. Listen and weep:

1- We mustn't shut our ears.

If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry
out and not be answered. (Proverbs 21:13 NIV)

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He who shuts his ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored
in his own time of need. (Proverbs 21:13 TLB)

To shut our ears means to refuse to listen to their cries. It means you throw away that request in the mail for the underprivileged in India without even opening it and praying about it. It means you refuse to make yourself vulnerable to the needs in a nursing home; you simply stay away so you can't hear their cries for love and help and hope. "What I can't hear can't hurt me" you surmise, but I've got a surprise for you: God says it can! If you turn a deaf ear to the hungry, the lonely, the seeking, the lame, the outcast God will see that when your ship sinks and you send out an SOS, the signal will just not quite reach the shore. You will have carved out a concept of ignoring needs that will be applied to your needs; and oh, how different it looks when "they and thee" become "you and me!"

Christians ought to be in the business of listening. They ought to have an ear to the ground of the congregation wanting to know who hurts so they can help. If you have shut your ears to the cries of the poor, your own cries for help will go unnoticed and unheard. God says it—that settles it!

2- *We must not shut our eyes.* Everywhere we look people are crying, and lonely, and hungry, and lost. Closed eyes mean a closed heart...and a closed heart needs open heart surgery.

He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who
closes his eyes to them receives many curses.
(Proverbs 28:27 NIV)

If you give to the poor your needs will be supplied, but a
curse upon those who close their eyes to poverty.
(Proverbs 28:27 TLB)

We're walking down the streets of real life on a day to day basis, and most of us are dreading confrontations with affliction—ours or someone else's—so we walk down life's highway looking for comfortable places-comfortable situations. We go where the suffering will be minimal; the demands upon our involvement will be acceptable.

We're living in a make-believe world that says everything's okay. Everybody's okay, as long as I can't see them. Suffering doesn't exist. We may even give a pledge to an organization who is feeding the poor in a far off land to ease our conscience, as

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long as we don't have to look at it. We can live with it if it's far away.

Oh, Christians, it's time we opened our eyes. They're crying! There's a whole world out there hungry, and lonely, and sick, and imprisoned, and blind, and lame, and afflicted. What they need is Jesus to give their affliction purpose; that's true.

But how can they believe in a God who cares when those who claim to be His ambassadors do not seem to care? Scripture asks the question, and we might do well to look for an answer:

Dear brothers, what's the use of saying you have faith and are Christians if you aren't proving it by helping others? Will that kind of faith save anyone? If you have a friend who is in need of food and clothing, and you say to him, Well, goodbye and God bless you, stay warm and eat hearty, and then don't give him clothes or food what good does that do?
(James 2:14 TLB)

I believe the goal of God for the Church is that we reassess our objectives and first of all, above all, remember that the word is everything and that the Kingdom we bring to a lost world is a spiritual kingdom. But I believe as well, we must as evangelicals be reminded continually that the gospel is falling on deaf ears because Christians either by design or default are despising, oppressing, mocking, exploiting, and ignoring the poor; those whose circumstances render them helpless or hopeless. We must open our ears. They are calling. We must open our eyes. They are crying. All about us are people who cannot hear our confession because they cannot see our compassion.

3- We must stand up for their rights.

The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.
(Proverbs 29:7 NIV)

A King who is fair to the poor shall have a long reign.
(Proverbs 29:14 TLB)

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.
(Proverbs 31:8 NIV)

We ignore the poor by refusing or failing to speak up for their rights in a world where it's natural to oppress them.

Apparently it is not only our concern to see that *we* do not abuse their rights. It is our concern to see, when we can (under

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authority), that society does not abuse their rights as well. This lesson was designed for only one purpose: to make us aware that God is concerned—vitaly concerned about how we feel about those society looks upon as the downtrodden...the widow, the orphan, the lame, the blind, the prisoner, the disabled, the jobless, the helpless. God is so concerned that He has warned us that to despise the poor or discriminate against them in your mind is sin. He has told us that to oppress them is to show contempt for the one who made them.

He has reminded us that to mock them is to mock the God who made them. He has promised us that income made from exploiting them will be taken from us by a God of justice, He has told us if we ignore them in their time of need, if we shut our ears to their cries, our own cries will be unheard in our time of need. And finally, He has told us that to shut our eyes to their needs will bring upon us the promise of a curse.

God apparently does not take lightly the cause of the downtrodden and the destitute; they are His special concern and He construes how his children respond to their needs to be their response to Him.

Our assignment, then, is not something to do but rather something to observe—to observe for seven days the needs of those whom God allows to pass before us: those in your own home, those in your world at work, those in your church family, and finally those about you in society that God sends alongside you this week. I want to ask us all to remember this one thought: we need to open our eyes. Some of them are crying.”

Parents are crying for help with their children. Husbands and wives are crying for help with their marriages. Christians in the midst of great warfare are crying for help to know the will of God and crying for the strength to be faithful. But more than that, if you open your eyes wide, and pray for the Spirit to give you God's kind of vision, you are going to see poverty you never knew existed. You are going to notice the elderly, the crippled, the blind, the widows. You are going to see that everywhere you go, people are crying—crying for love, crying for wisdom, crying for answers, crying for acceptance.

It's time we opened our eyes...they are crying! We can despise them, or oppress them, or mock them or exploit them and suffer

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the consequences, but more than that, we can ignore them. We can shut our ears to their cries and close our eyes to their tears. We can just go on our way pretending they don't exist; pretending they're not crying. This week every time we pass someone who is obviously hurting, every time our paths cross someone whose life obviously has been scarred by tragedy or poverty or pain, why not, instead of closing our eyes and pretending, why not stop and quietly pray "Lord, open my eyes; he's crying, she's crying. Lord, open my eyes and open my heart and teach me how to give my life away."

Just a smile instead of a frown will make that elderly lady in the wheel chair feel like a million dollars. Just a phone call will make that one who is so afflicted know somebody actually loves him. Just a squeeze of the hand, a word of encouragement to one who is being crushed by life, is like a breath of fresh air that says "somebody cares".

We'll need in the weeks ahead to go beyond that. Some of us must learn how to overcome the prejudices and the fear of contamination that so plagues our ability to reach out to the poor and the needy. That can come later. At least for one week, let's ask God just to open our eyes so we can see.

When He opens our eyes we will see some of them are crying. And when we begin to see how badly they are hurting, some of us may be crying, too.

OPEN YOUR EYES, THEY'RE CRYING

Oh, Beloved, look about you.
Do you see what's really there?
Hungry, lonely, hurting people,
Needy people—everywhere.

Some are crying "won't you help me?"
Yet somehow we do not hear.
Some are saying, "Does God love me?
Won't His people dare come near?"

"I won't harm them, though I'm dirty,
Or unpleasant just to see;
I'm just longing for acceptance.
Isn't there a friend for me?"

Can you not hear Jesus saying,
"That's why I have placed you there.
Open your eyes—they are crying
Crying for someone to care."

Open your eyes. They are crying.
Show them that they're not alone.
Open your heart to their crying,
And Jesus will make Himself known.

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