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A GOSPEL CENTERED AND HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CARING FOR INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING POVERTY

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A GOSPEL CENTERED AND HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CARING FOR INDIVIDUALS
EXPERIENCING POVERTY

A PROJECT DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
IN THE BARNETT COLLEGE OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY
AT SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
LEON BATTLE
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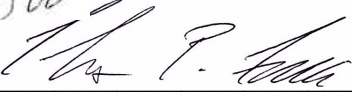
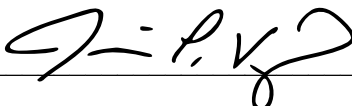
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Leon Battle

under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Committee and approved by all members of the Committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the Barnett College of Ministry and Theology of Southeastern University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.

Date

April 13, 2022

Signature		Jeff Davis, D.Min. Chair, First Reader
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ABSTRACT

Poverty is a major contributor of negative effects to individual health, mental health, and quality of life. The call God has for Christians is to care for individuals experiencing poverty. The question the research aims to answer is: “What elements are important to provide a holistic feeding program that meets the need of an individual physically and spiritually?”

Literature on the issue of poverty, a thorough review of scriptures, as well as insights from experts in the field provided information on historical and contemporary issues affecting the poor. Data for this project was collected through a mixed methods study consisting of ten non-profit and local church leaders. A content analysis approach was utilized and the research looked for trends and insights. The findings of the research concluded that local churches and non-profit organizations could benefit from training staff and volunteers on evangelism, implementing evidence-informed curriculum for clients, and using metrics to help inform whether the services offered to families are making an impact. This project will inform the reader of potential methods to incorporate in Christian feeding programs to provide a holistic approach to care for the needs of individuals living in poverty.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to children and families living in poverty. Through the power of Jesus Christ, may non-profit organizations and local churches find creative ways to stand beside you, empower you, and love you the way God has commanded.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank those who stood beside me during this journey. My future wife, Casey Phillips for encouraging and loving me through this process. My mother, Tina Moreau, for your relentless love. My father, Leon Battle Jr. for always believing in me and encouraging me to take this step. My step-mother, Shanda Battle, for making sure I had what I needed to see this to completion. My sister, Schala Battle, for being the best big sis a man could ask for and being such a great role model, friend, sounding board, and encourager through all of my stages of life. My uncle Gene, who passed before the completion of this project. I wish you could see me walk the line; I know how proud you would have been and I wouldn't be where I am today without you. Aunt Lori for always pushing me in my academics. April, for being more than a cousin, you are my sister and I cherish our relationship. My closest friends, you know who you are. Thank you for being my brothers! The caring adults who were also my pastors, you were present in my childhood and helped me get to where I am (David, Justin, Mike, and Bob). And finally all of my coworkers and friends at One More Child.

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Dr. Jeff Davis: You constantly checked up on me and pushed me towards excellence. Your experience in this field and heart for people shine through in everything you do. Thank you for believing in me and supporting me through this process.

Dr. Tom Felke: You came highly recommended. We did not know each other prior to this process but you came in with your wealth of knowledge in the social work field. After our first conversation, I knew you were the right person to help guide me through this process.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROJECT INTRODUCED

Introduction

One mandate stressed throughout the Old Testament and New Testament is to take care of the poor.¹ Proverbs 28:27 clearly states, “Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses.”² The Epistle of James asserts: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”³ Throughout this project passages from both the Old Testament and New Testament will be investigated to show the theology of caring for the poor, both spiritually and physically.

Through local churches, Christians attempt to fulfill the mandate to care for individuals experiencing poverty in various ways. Christians also do so through the creation of non-profit organizations. One-way local churches and Christian non-profit organizations care for individuals experiencing poverty is by providing food through soup kitchens, food pantries, and food distribution sites. Providing food helps decrease their physical needs. However, in addition to feeding those experiencing poverty, local churches and Christian non-profit organizations must also provide life skills and access to the Gospel. This project will focus on issues affecting

¹ When examining Scripture, the writer will use the word poor to stay aligned with Scriptural language. Throughout the rest of the project the writer will use a person-first approach instead of the word poor. For example, individuals experiencing poverty, working individuals experiencing poverty, individuals experiencing homelessness, etc.

² Proverbs 28:27 (the New International Version [NIV] will be used for this dissertation project unless otherwise specified)

³ James 1:27

the poor, the Biblical mandate to care for the poor, and how Christian organizations can provide a holistic approach to meeting their physical and spiritual needs.

Rational for the Project

This project aims to offer direction for leaders of local churches and non-profit organizations that provide well rounded feeding programs. Throughout Christian history, different views on how Christians should care for individuals experiencing poverty has evolved. In the 19th century, the *social gospel* arose. Ministers took seriously the commandment of Jesus to “love thy neighbor.”⁴ From the pulpit, preachers began to challenge their congregations to alleviate the sufferings of those experiencing poverty. Walter Rauschenbusch, a famous American Baptist preacher at the end of the 19th century, taught that “individualism” meant tyranny. He promoted Christian socialism, and this became a part of the Christian movement.

Some of those who accepted this teaching began to believe that Christ’s return would only happen if social justice eradicated social evils.⁵ While Rauschenbusch’s teaching highlighted the fact that it is vital to help individuals experiencing poverty and oppression, the response to his teaching created an imbalanced approach. Some who followed his teaching began to neglect the sharing of Gospel in their work to create social change. While social justice is essential, Christians must remember that Christ commanded His followers to go and make disciples. The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus’ command, known as “The Great Commission”: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of

⁴ Matthew 22:36-40

⁵ “Walter Rauschenbusch” in *Christian History*. Accessed July 21, 2019.
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/activists/walter-rauschenbusch.html>.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."⁶

Providing food to individuals experiencing poverty is an excellent way for Christians to meet their physical needs. Feeding programs also provide an opportunity for Christians to create positive change in their communities. The USDA reported: "An estimated 11.8 percent of American households were food insecure at least some time during the year in 2017, meaning they lacked access to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members."⁷ Christians are missing an opportunity to make disciples if they are providing care for individuals in their communities but neglect the presentation of the Gospel.

The purpose of this research project will be to answer the question: "What elements are important to provide a holistic feeding program that meets the physical and spiritual needs of an individual?" The project will gather data from ten Christian non-profit organizations and local churches on how they are providing care for individuals experiencing poverty. This project will then demonstrate the key elements for running an effective feeding program, which meets both the physical and spiritual needs of clients. God's heart is not for individuals to survive on bread alone but by and through His Spirit, which is provided to all who seek to find Him.⁸

Pertinence to the Student's Ministry

From personal experience, professional involvement, and academic studies, this writer understands the needs of individuals living in poverty. This writer was raised in a single parent

⁶ Mt. 28:19-21

⁷ Alisha Coleman-Jensen, *et al.* "Household Food Security in the United States in 2017" Accessed July 6, 2019. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=90022>.

⁸ Matt. 4:4

household, where there was limited food in the home. School lunches, church events, and meals at the homes of friends supplemented the lack of food at home.

The writer had an opportunity to study food insecurity in the pursuit of a Master's Degree in Human Services. These studies were done shortly after working at the Department of Children and Families where the writer worked with children in the dependency system. The dependency system is the system of care for children who are at risk of being removed or who have been removed from their homes. During time spent as a Child Protection Investigator at the Department of Children and Families, the writer worked with families experiencing food insecurity and poverty. One of the requirements of a Child Protection Investigator was to check the refrigerator and the pantries of the family's homes being investigated to determine whether or not the family had a sufficient supply of food. It was alarming to see the lack of food in many of the homes visited.

In 2014, the writer took a director position at a non-profit organization called One More Child. The mission of the organization is to provide Christ-centered services to vulnerable children and struggling families. The organization achieves its mission through five main programs. These areas include foster care, anti-trafficking, family support services, child hunger, and a single mother's program. In 2021, One More Child provided services to over 324,467 individuals and provided over eighteen million meals to children and families locally and globally. In 2017, the writer created and directed One More Child's feeding program, which distributed over 7.4 million meals in the first year. The writer also created and directed the family support program, which provides life skills, such as financial literacy, career counseling, and parenting for families experiencing poverty alongside the feeding program. The feeding program uses four methods of distributions.

The first method consists of distributing food through partnership with local feeding programs. Each month, One More Child provides between 700,000 and 1,000,000 pounds of food to other feeding programs in the community.⁹ In 2021, the organization distributed more than 18,000,000 pounds of food. One More Child acquires food for free through private food distributors, therefore, does not charge other providers for the food they receive.

The second method used by One More Child is to distribute food is the Backpack Meal Program that serves Title-1 schools. Under the U.S. Department of Education, any school that draws five percent or more of their enrollment from children in low-income families is eligible to become a Title-1 school and receive assistance to help raise the opportunities of success for the lowest-achieving students.¹⁰ Many of the children from Title 1 schools rely on the food the school provides as their primary source for nourishment. During the weekend, many of these children experience hunger. Because these children are missing meals, attendance in schools decrease on the following Mondays. Children who are in school have lower attention spans and amplified behavioral issues.¹¹

One of the first schools One More Child started serving was a community school in Sulphur Springs, Florida, where 98% of the children attending the school are part of families whose income falls below the poverty line.¹² The school became a priority school for One More Child after reports that the student's academics were suffering due to hunger. The principal at the

⁹ "Our Mission," One More Child, Accessed July 26, 2019. <https://onemorechild.org/about-us/our-mission/>.

¹⁰ "Title I, Part A Program," Program Home Page, November 7, 2018. Accessed July 6, 2019. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>.

¹¹ Nader S. Kabbani and Myra Yazbeck Kmeid, "The Role of Food Assistance in Helping Food Insecure Households Escape Hunger," *Review of Agricultural Economics* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 442. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9353.2005.00241.x>.

¹² Poverty line for a household of 1 is \$27,180, for 2 it is \$46,620, for 3 it is \$46,060, for 4 it is \$55,500, for 5 it is \$64,940, for 6 it is \$74,380, for 7 it is \$83,820, for 8 it is \$93,260, and for each person over 8, \$9,440 need to be added.

school contacted One More Child after a young girl who was a star performer started having academic and behavior problems. One of the teachers noticed food starting to go missing from the classroom and discovered that the young girl was putting the food in her backpack. After further investigation, the teacher learned that her mother lost her job and had to decide whether to buy food or pay the electricity and rent. This young child started receiving food through One More Child's Backpack Meal Program, and the teachers reported that the student's academics and behavior quickly improved. Sadly, the student was not the only one with such a story. There are many children like the young girl just described. Since the partnership between One More Child and the community school started, school administrators have seen a dramatic increase in grades and behavior.

The third way One More Child provides food for families is through the residential and family support program. One More Child provides transitional homes for struggling families. While the families are living on the campus, they are able to shop in the food pantry. Families who do not need housing have an opportunity to receive food through the family support program and are equipped with life skills classes to help them gain self-sufficiency.

The fourth way the organization provides food to families is through its global work. One More Child is currently serving thirteen countries.¹³ Each location is serving the needs of those communities in the unique ways they need to be served. Woven throughout each of these program locations are feeding programs that ensure the children and families have nutrient rich food in order to help them thrive emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

In 2019, the writer was promoted to Vice President of Strategic Partnerships at One More Child. The responsibilities of this position include the following: developing and overseeing

¹³ Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Kenya, Latvia, Nicaragua, Romania, South Africa, South Asia, Tanzania, and Uganda.

relationships with partners who will help advance the mission of the organization; managing the child hunger program; and supervising the partnership directors of the organizations. As the leader of the child hunger program, the writer ensures sufficient nutritious food is available to One More Child's clients and creates partnerships with other Christian non-profit organizations and churches to run food pantries and soup kitchens. The ability to achieve the organization's goals comes through partnerships with food distributors such as Publix, Wal-Mart, Kroger, Sysco, Cheney Brothers, Farm Share, and many other private food distributors. These partners have helped decrease food insecurity throughout Florida. The private food distributors receive testimonials of children and families positively impacted by the food they provide.

One issue observed by the writer through working with other feeding programs is the absence of life skills programs, Gospel presentation, and discipleship in Christian feeding programs. It is rare to come across an organization that provides all these services well. The writer desires to develop curriculums and programs for feeding programs that encompass these areas.

Limitations of the Project

In this project, the writer will research the impact of local church and non-profit feeding programs in central Florida. This study involves the integration of the Gospel within Christian feeding programs; therefore, the study will be limited to the experiences of Christian organizations. The local churches and non-profit organizations interviewed in this study are located in central Florida. Therefore, the research will not include other states or countries.

This study will explore what elements create an effective holistic feeding program that provides opportunities for clients to hear the Gospel. The data for this project will be collected

through a mixed methods study consisting of ten non-profit and local church leaders that are leading feeding programs. A content analysis approach will be utilized, and the research will look for trends and insights. The participants of the research will be interviewed and surveyed. The desired outcome from the research will be a well-rounded program that will benefit Christian non-profit and local church feeding programs.

Research Methodology

This project will consist of four stages of research: theological and literary research, recruitment of participants and programs for the study, preparation of the survey, and evaluation of the data. The first stage will be a review of relevant literature on the topic. During this stage, the writer will be using public libraries as well as the physical library and online database resources of Southeastern University's Steelman Library. The writer will examine books written by experts in the field, other dissertations on the topic, and material found through internet search engines. The data collected will be both theological and secular studies on food insecurity, feeding programs, and the empowerment of individuals in financial need. Finally, the research will focus on the theological perspectives of evangelism.

The second stage of the project will be to survey individuals presently leading feeding programs. The writer will use his current network of feeding programs receiving food resources from One More Child. All of the organizations will be Christian organizations. The individuals leading feeding programs will be notified of the study through phone calls and emails. There will be a total of ten local churches and non-profit organizations surveyed. These programs will include The Dream Center, One More Child, Combee Connection, Lighthouse Ministries, Kathleen Baptist Church, Missionary Baptist Church, Parker Street Ministries, Mt. Tabor Baptist

Church, which are all located in Lakeland. Faith Extreme in Winter Haven, Florida and The Freedom Tour in Lake Wales, Florida.

The third stage of the research will be to prepare the surveys used for the research. A web-based program called SurveyMonkey will be utilized to distribute the survey to those who have agreed to participate in the research. A timeline will be given to complete the survey and the writer will be available to the participants if further clarification is needed.

The survey will include the following questions:

1. What type of feeding program does your organization or church offer or utilize?
2. What influenced your church or organization to start a feeding program?
3. What life skills services do you provide (sewing, cooking, reading, education, job readiness, budgeting), if any?
4. How do you judge the success of your program?
5. How is the Gospel presented to the clients you serve?
6. Is there evangelism training for your staff/volunteers?
7. Does your program track Gospel presentations or salvations? If so, how do you measure and track these?
8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the method of Gospel presentation you incorporate?
9. How is the presentation of the Gospel received?
10. Would Gospel-centered curriculums and programs that focus on life skills and client empowerment benefit your program?

Once the surveys are collected, an analysis of the non-profits services that are being provided will be evaluated and analyzed, and a synthesis within the ministry context will be

created. The participants surveyed will not receive any financial compensation from conducting the survey or being part of the research but will have the opportunity to review the results.

Project Goals and Objectives

1. Goal – Understand the Biblical mandates for caring for the poor and what the role of the Church is today.
 - a. Objective – Research Old and New Testament Scripture that teach how Christians should care for the poor and provide clarity on how Christians should carry out these teachings today.
 - b. Objective – Research what Scripture teaches about sharing the Gospel with those who are not yet Christians, specifically those who are in need and do not yet know Christ.
 - c. Objective – Explore how the early church implemented the mandate to care for the poor and needy.
2. Goal – Understand how Christians can provide high quality care for individuals living in poverty.
 - a. Objective – Gather and analyze information from literature and experts in the field on historical and contemporary issues affecting individuals experiencing poverty.
 - b. Objective – Gather and analyze information from literature and experts on how to care for individuals experiencing poverty.
3. Goal – Evaluate the effectiveness of ten feeding programs in central Florida.

- a. Objective - Identify the ways local churches and Christian non-profit organizations are addressing the issue of food insecurity in their communities. The information collected will provide a better understanding of the programs that exist and what needs the programs have.
- b. Objective – Measure the effectiveness of the different local churches and Christian non-profit organizations’ feeding programs, life skills programs, and Gospel integration. Analyze the program’s strengths and weaknesses. The information collected will help frame ways in which feeding programs can effectively share the Gospel with their clients.

Summary

Local churches and non-profit organizations have an opportunity to meet the needs of individuals experiencing poverty in their communities. Through the study of Scripture, theology, and current literature, an exploration of how to meet their physical needs, as well as their spiritual needs, should become clearer. This will be combined with research of several local churches and Christian non-profit feeding programs. The writer desires to help existing feeding programs, as well as new ones, find new ways in creating physical and spiritual changes for the clients they serve. Gospel-centered feeding programs can bring hope to those who are lacking, and life to those who are spiritually hurting.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROJECT IN PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

The first chapter highlights the need for Christian non-profit organizations to meet the need of individuals experiencing food insecurity in the United States. The purpose of this chapter is to explore Scriptures that frame the need for churches and Christian non-profit organizations to provide care for individuals experiencing poverty and hunger. There are many Christian and secular organizations providing care for the needy, and there are many different views of how this should be accomplished. The purpose of this project is not to discredit secular efforts, but to show why and how Christian non-profit organizations should fulfill the Biblical mandates.

The research will begin by engaging biblical and theological sources that show why God desires to care for struggling families and vulnerable people. Scriptures, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, point towards why and how God's people of the Old Testament and the Early Church met the needs of the poor. After exploring Scriptures, attention will be given to how the church and Christian non-profit organizations have historically responded to the need. Next, the author will look at how society has addressed this issue, what has worked well and what has failed, and what areas could use improvement? Finally, the research will examine church and non-profit organizations to see how effective Christians have been in feeding the hungry and presenting the Gospel.

Biblical and Theological Dimensions

Old Testament Scriptures

Throughout the Torah, God created laws to ensure “just” treatment of the poor. Poverty comes in many different forms and unlike the English language the Hebrew language has many terms for the word “poor”: *ānî* (76 times), *’ebyôn* (61 times), *dal* (48 times), *rwš* (21 times), *miskēn* (4 times).¹⁴

The word *’ānî* has a broad meaning, including ‘weak’, ‘miserable’, ‘helpless’ and ‘suffering’.¹⁵ It can refer to the socially and materially poor who are dependent on support from other people (Exod. 22:21–27; Lev. 19:10; Is. 3:14–15; Hab. 3:14). But in the psalms of Lament, where a common self-designation is ‘I am poor and needy’, the ‘need’ is never material poverty, such as lack of food or clothing or other necessities for life; it is persecution by enemies, illness and bodily weakness, or guilt. The supplicants present themselves as helpless beggars before God.¹⁶ In some contexts, the *’ānî* is contrasted with the ‘proud’; ‘humility’ is presented as a positive moral quality (Prov. 3:34; Ps. 18:27; Zech. 9:9; Zeph. 2:3).¹⁷ *Dal* is translated as “one who is low, poor, reduced, helpless, weak.” and in addition, the word may connote social poverty or lowliness. As such, *dal* describes those who are counterparts of the great. This word is also used to describe someone who is spiritually poor, but that is very rare.¹⁸

The Torah

¹⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F Wright, and J.I. Packer, eds., “New Dictionary of Theology” (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 687–689.

¹⁵ Psalm 35:10, Psalm 74:21, Psalm 86:1

¹⁶ Ferguson, 687.

¹⁷ Ferguson, 687.

¹⁸ W.E. Vines, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, “Vine’s Complete Dictionary of OT Words,” <https://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/eng/vot/p/poor-person-weak-person.html>.

In the Torah, God created a covenant with the Israelites after He provided a way out of their slavery under the hand of Pharaoh. After the Israelites left Egypt, God called them to enter into a covenant with Him. God's plan for Israel was for them to act as His intermediation. Stuart, an Old Testament scholar, explains: "Israel's assignment from God involved intermediation. They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him."¹⁹

The Israelites were to be a holy nation, blessed by God, to be an example to other nations and to help display His ways rooted in truth, justice, favor, discipline, and holiness.²⁰ In the Book of Exodus, there are directives of how to care for the poor. The first law dealing with the needy, commanded God's people to not take advantage of the poor. The law also gave instruction regarding the methods in which lending money to the poor should be conducted. When a loan was provided, the lender was prohibited from charging interest to the poor. God was clear about the consequences of wrongdoing, He declared that if a needy person was taken advantage of, then the person in the wrong should be killed.²¹

The needy included a wide range of individuals. Stuart explains, "The terms 'aliens,' 'widows,' 'orphans,' 'poor/needy' are not intended to be an exhaustive list of certain categories of people. Instead, they are intended to be evocative of the entire range of disadvantaged,

¹⁹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 359.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 360.

²¹ Exodus 22:22-27.

unprotected, and easily mistreated individuals and groups in ancient times, including those among the Israelites who were disadvantaged in any way.”²²

The second directive was to not be partial to the poor during testimony in a lawsuit and also for judges not to deny justice to the poor.²³ Exodus 23:3 calls for justice. The poor were to have a fair trial. The poor were not to be given favoritism if they were in the wrong in a lawsuit, but should also not be denied justice, especially since they did not have the means to ensure a just trial and were less likely to have influence with the jury.²⁴ The third commandment given to the Israelites concerning the poor was to establish the sabbatical year. This included leaving the land unplowed and unused so that the poor could gather food from it.²⁵ The purpose of the sabbatical year was to let the land rest and also provide aid to the poor.²⁶

The book of Leviticus has many of the same commands as Exodus, including providing gleanings, warning against partiality and favoritism, and warns against perverting justice and judging your neighbor.²⁷ God commanded the Israelites not to glean the corners of their fields and they were not to gather the gleanings of the harvest. Rooker, an Old Testament scholar, explains:

The ‘gleanings’ designate those ears of corn or grain that were inadvertently dropped by the harvester; the worker was not to work his way back over the field but rather leave the food for the needy. The poor were thus provided for, but they had to come and glean the portions of the field themselves. This act of generosity was not a handout, but it was a

²² Stuart, *Exodus*, 445.

²³ Exodus 23:3.

²⁴ Stuart, *Exodus*, 453.

²⁵ Exodus 23:11.

²⁶ Stuart, *Exodus*, 456.

²⁷ Leviticus 19:10-15.

means for those who were without property or who had fallen on bad times to be maintained (Ruth 2).²⁸

Leviticus 25 introduces the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee. During the Sabbath Year, which was every seven years, the Israelites were not to sow or reap from their fields. What grew naturally in those fields would be given to those who had fallen on hard times. In the closing of Leviticus 25, God reminds the Israelites of their rescue from slavery, reminding them of their need to be kind and loving towards others who fall on hard time.²⁹

In Leviticus, God instructed that the Israelites also recognize the Year of Jubilee.³⁰ The Year of Jubilee would occur after seven cycles of seven years (49 years), the fiftieth year was to be a time of celebration and rejoicing for the Israelites. Trumpets would sound on the Day of Atonement and liberty was proclaimed throughout the land. People would return to their family, and they would return to their personal property. Jews who were enslaved to another Jew or who had to sell their property were released from their slavery and the land was returned to the original owner. The returning of land was God looking out for the weak because it was a violation of God's covenant for the rich to dominate the poor. This was God's law regarding the aid to those in need. When loaning money, the Israelites were not to charge interest on loans and were to be given food at wholesale rates.³¹

The theme of caring for the needy is repeated in the book of Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy has two Hebrew names. One stems from the first line in Deuteronomy that reads,

²⁸ Mark Rooker and Dennis R. Cole, *Leviticus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 231.

²⁹ Rooker and Cole, 261.

³⁰ Lev. 25:1-55.

³¹ Rooker and Cole, 264–71.

“These are the words,”³² and the second comes later in Deuteronomy, which refers to the book as a copy of the law.³³ The second name comes from the Greek translation *Deuteronomion*, which means ‘second law’.³⁴ Thompson explains:

At the heart of Deuteronomy’s theology is the claim that keeping the commands is how the people received blessing and remain intimately related to God; following the commands is how the community maintains its covenant ties... a number of the laws command special treatment of the most marginalized, limit the authority of leaders, and express consistent concern for how individual actions affect the community as a whole, all vital issues for God’s people of any age.³⁵

The book of Deuteronomy is the reaffirmation of the Law that was provided in Exodus and Leviticus to the new generation of Hebrews journeying through the wilderness. God makes known to the new generation that He will defend the fatherless and the widow and gives food and clothing to them, and commands those who follow Him to do the same.³⁶ The Deuteronomist places an importance on caring for the poor, providing them with gleanings, and every third year providing the poor with tithes.³⁷ A reminder of what life was like for the Jewish people during their exodus is used to remind them why these commandments are important.

The Prophets

The Old Testament provides insight on how the Prophets took up the cause of the poor. The socio-economic culture during the times of the Prophets will be examined throughout the

³² Deuteronomy 1:1.

³³ Deuteronomy 17:18.

³⁴ Deanna A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁶ Deuteronomy 10:18.

³⁷ Deuteronomy 10:18-19, 14:28-29, 24:17-18, 24: 19-22, 26: 12-15, 27:19.

exploration of some of the major Prophets. Economic greed and the oppression of the poor were evident during the era of the Prophets. Theologians Bradley and Lindsey explain: “The condition of the poor worsened during the days of the monarchy – especially under kings David and Solomon – as some became fabulously rich and others fell behind. The infusion of silver and gold to the monarchy, along with a number of other luxury products from afar in the royal court, spurred the growing disparity between rich and poor as the standard of living grew apart.”³⁸

The author of Deuteronomy provided guidance and instruction when selecting a king. “Be sure to appoint over you a king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, ‘You are not to go back that way again.’ He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.”³⁹ Unfortunately, David and Solomon did not follow the instructions pertaining to the accumulation of wealth. Obedience is ultimately a matter of the heart. David and Solomon’s disobedience made their hearts turn from God’s commands, including the treatment and welfare of the poor.⁴⁰

The times were prosperous in Israel and Judah during the days of the prophet Amos. The nobles and rich had summer cottages to enjoy, they owned custom built homes, they ate well, the

³⁸ Anne Rathbone Bradley and Arthur Lindsley, *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 39. Accessed December 20, 2021. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5397560>.

³⁹ Deuteronomy 17: 14-17

⁴⁰ Thompson, 103.

vineyards flourished, and business was booming which brought great profits.⁴¹ Despite all of this, taxes were high and were a burden to the average landholder, public administration were the ones who profited from the taxation, and worst of all the poor were seen as an expendable commodity.⁴² Guenther, an Old Testament scholar and professor, explains, “The poor person had no real access to justice when the only legal recourse was to appeal to the very rich who also sat as judges in the local courts (2:7; 5:7, 12, 15). Corruption was rampant. Power prevailed. Those at the bottom end of the economic ladder were pawns to be used and discarded at will (8:4-6).”⁴³ Amos came as God’s representative to call His people back to moral responsibility.

Amos did not mince words when he spoke on these issues and pronounced the Lord’s judgment and on those who did not heed his words. For example, Amos described the wives of prominent families as cows of Bashan. These wives lived in Samaria which could be compared to Washington, D.C. of the Northern Kingdom. The cows of Bashan were a superb breed of cattle. Calling a woman, a Cow of Bashan may have been an honorable designation and even used by women to describe their social and religious status. However, some believe that this was Amos giving an “in your face” opening to an after-dinner address.⁴⁴

Through Amos, God pointed out Israel’s great number of faults. He accused the Israelites of selling the righteous for a pair of shoes and warned against these actions.⁴⁵ The righteous did not mean the person of virtue, but the one who was in the right. They betrayed those who were

⁴¹ Allen Guenther, *Hosea, Amos: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 229.

⁴² Lind, *Ezekiel: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, 230.

⁴³ Guenther, 230.

⁴⁴ Guenther, 231.

⁴⁵ Amos 2:6.

innocent for their own monetary gain. They were oppressing the poor, crushing the needy, turning aside the poor, trampling the destitute, bringing the poor of the land to an end, and buying the poor and needy for silver or sandals.⁴⁶ The Israelite wronged the needy for the sake of profit. The Israelites strayed away from the path of the lowly, meaning that they made the correct behavior of the lowly into a negative attribute. The negative behavior and actions towards the poor and lowly amongst other wrongs resulted in God proclaiming that He would inflict extreme punishment on those who were conducting the wrong-doings and only the needy and without resources and status will find salvation.⁴⁷

The book of Isaiah calls God's people to turn from their rebellion and their wicked ways. God's people were in rebellion and were worshiping other gods during the time of Isaiah. God called His people to repentance and promised redemption if they would repent. Not only did God call His people to repentance, He took his command a step further calling the Israelites to defend the fatherless and plead for the widow.⁴⁸ The Israelites were not quick to change their ways, therefore they reaped condemnation because they continued to take from the poor and were oppressing them. Because of these sins, God casts judgment on the leaders and elders, declaring, "It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by cursing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?"⁴⁹ Old Testament scholars, Hayes and Irving explain "The evil Isaiah condemns among the leaders of the day is their exploitation of their own people, probably through excessive interest, land foreclosures, debt

⁴⁶ Amos 4:1, 5:12, 8:4, 8:6.

⁴⁷ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, Robert C. Hill, trans. 1st ed., vol. 108 (Baltimore: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 137-38. Accessed December 15, 2021. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/215201450>.

⁴⁸ Isaiah 1:17

⁴⁹ Isaiah 3:14-15

slavery, and the use of the apparatus of government to fill their own coffers.”⁵⁰ The leaders were using the government system for their own gain, rather than for the good of God’s people.

The judgment towards those who use the system for their own gain and the oppression of the needy continues in Isaiah chapter 10. The chapter opens with a woe, signifying that the Lord demands laws that will protect the poor rather than the laws that have been put in place to cause injustice.⁵¹ The scriptures outline leaders who were creating unjust laws, oppressive decrees, depriving the rights of the poor, withholding justice from the oppressed, making widow their pray and robbing the fatherless.⁵²

Furthermore, in the reading of Isaiah, there is an appeal from God to practice true fasting. God’s people were desiring to feel near to God and were asking why He was not noticing them, even though they were fasting the way they thought they should fast. Friesen, a professor, pastor, and author, explains: “No doubt the form that piety takes is noticed on high. But in God’s design, form and substance belong together.”⁵³ If the people are to fast, God did not want it to be for their own self-interest; He wanted also that there be a focus and concern for others. God asks: “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, the Eighth Century Prophet: His Times and Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 92.

⁵¹ Ivan Friesen, *Isaiah: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009), 91.

⁵² Isaiah 10:2.

⁵³ Friesen, 364.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 58:6-7.

After the rhetorical questioning used in these verses, God explains what the fulfillment of fasting will be when others are in mind: “Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here I am. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in 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 noonday.”⁵⁵ Friesen explains that, “Your light refers to the clarity of insight that fasting is a spiritual resource for social action. This clarity rests on the authority of the speaker (the Lord) and not merely on human insight. Your healing indicates restoration of social health as an accompaniment of spiritual healing. Your righteousness means right behavior as the vanguard of God’s people.”⁵⁶

In Isaiah chapter 61, good news of liberation is brought forth. The proclamation is similar to the proclamation of a Jubilee year found in Leviticus. In both Leviticus and Isaiah, the promise is directed towards the poor and downtrodden. The message coming from the anointed prophet is a proclamation of redemption. The speaker in chapter 61 proclaims, “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Isaiah 58:8-10.

⁵⁶ Friesen, 366.

⁵⁷ Isaiah 61:1-3.

The Spirit is using Isaiah to be God's agent to bring wholeness and redemption to the individual and to the community.⁵⁸

The prophet Jeremiah was called by God to redirect the actions of the Israelites as well. God called him to tear down false practices and traditions of God's people and then rebuild them by providing a roadmap to right living. After Jeremiah's calling from God, God began to remind Israel of the love and devotion they had towards him during their time in the wilderness.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, Israel had turned from their love and devotion. Martens, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament and President of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, explains: "Sadly, that once-beautiful relationship, is virtually in pieces."⁶⁰

Jeremiah looks to find someone who is faithful to the Lord and there is none to be found. He starts with the poor. However, in this context he is not referring to the economically poor, but to the common citizens. He then looks towards the leaders and finds that they are no better than the ordinary citizens.⁶¹ Jerusalem's evil deeds have no limit, they do not seek justice and do not care for the poor and fatherless.⁶² God confronted those in power who have the opportunity to take on the cause of the poor yet choose to only care about their own interests.⁶³

Throughout Judah and Jerusalem, all had chosen greed, from the least to the greatest, even the priests and prophets, practiced deceit.⁶⁴ Jeremiah passed on words of affirmation

⁵⁸ Friesen, 387.

⁵⁹ Jeremiah 2:2-3.

⁶⁰ Elmer Martens, *Jeremiah: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1986), 41.

⁶¹ Martens, 63.

⁶² Jeremiah 5:28.

⁶³ Martens, 67.

⁶⁴ Jeremiah 8:10.

towards king Josiah who defended the cause of the poor and needy, and he declared forcefully that God's people should do no wrong to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.⁶⁵ Through Jeremiah, God lays out the basics for good government, "Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place."⁶⁶ Martens explains: "Justice goes beyond being fair in legal decisions. It deals with helping those who are victims of oppression, people cheated from their land or wages by large landowners or employers. It also means not taking advantage of people who are easily exploited or mistreated: aliens, orphans, and widows."⁶⁷

The same theme of injustice is addressed in the Book of Ezekiel and deals with the fundamental laws: cultic laws, comprised of rejecting pagan places of worship and false idols, and moral laws regarding how to treat others.⁶⁸ Lind, who has taught on the Book of Ezekiel for over thirty years, explains: "A first principle of economic justice in the Old Testament is that theology and economics are intrinsically related. Over half the legal listings of Ezekiel chapter 18 have to do with economic justice, laws which guard against oppression and violence. These economic laws are listed together with laws dealing with theology, the worship and service of one God. One cannot understand biblical justice without grasping this unique relationship of theology and economics."⁶⁹ In the book of Ezekiel, Judah's leadership is still using power to

⁶⁵ Jeremiah 22:3.

⁶⁶ Jeremiah 22:3.

⁶⁷ Martens, 145.

⁶⁸ Martens, 150.

⁶⁹ Millard Lind, *Ezekiel: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 377.

oppress the needy. Again, the needy are denied justice and again God looks for one person of integrity so His divine wrath would not be set into motion, but there was no one to be found.⁷⁰

Through the study of Old Testament laws and the teachings of the prophets, the care for the poor was an important focus in the Old Testament and was carried forward by Christ and the apostles. The injustice towards the poor and lowly occurred throughout history. God took the side of the poor countless times and demanded repentance along with a change in behavior. Moving into the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles continue with instructions on how the poor should be treated.

New Testament Scriptures

Poverty in the Roman world

Outside influence dominated what was once the nation of Israel. McNutt, professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Canisius College, explains: "...the people of Palestine were constantly throughout their history subject to outside influence and often political control. Much of the region was controlled by Egypt during the Late Bronze Age, by Assyria and Babylonia during Iron Age II, by the Persians during the period that is named for them, and in later periods by the Greeks, the Romans, and more recently, the Turkish Ottoman Empire."⁷¹ Therefore, God's command and methods of caring for the poor were not the law of land.

During the time of Jesus and the Early Church, the Roman world was growing at a remarkable pace, making Rome the first western city to surpass a million inhabitants. The dense

⁷⁰ Ezekiel 22:29-30.

⁷¹ Paula M McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 137.

population created food supply issues.⁷² There were two problems that arose and took a front seat in the Roman world. The first was that the poor were a distinct social group and the way the poor were seen and treated was evolving. While the poor never became a distinct class, the issue of poverty began to be viewed as a social and political problem, which meant there was a need for the development of systematic treatment.⁷³ Brown, a professor with a focus on the religious culture of the later Roman Empire explains,

It has become a commonplace for scholars to talk of the “harsh moral climate” of the Greco-Roman world. This is because, as we will see, classic society did not invest acts of generosity to the poor with the same, high ideological charge as did Jews and Christians. But the contrast between pagan and Christian times is somewhat forced. A society without a Christian sense of ‘charity’ found room, on many occasions, for what Greek contemporaries called ‘philanthropic’ actions. Provided that they fit into recognizable categories to which the rich felt that they owed some obligation – as clients, as dependents, as relatives, and as fellow citizens – there was no lack of outreach to the distressed.⁷⁴

During the pre-industrial era, the economy revolved around agriculture. During this era, lack of access to land was a major reason for poverty. Those who had the ability to own or rent land that was large enough and had favorable climate conditions, were able to farm the land, which would provide food for their family.⁷⁵

During the urbanization of the Roman World, individuals were able to enter craft activities or work in the service industry. Individuals in these fields were able to secure food through these jobs, but these jobs never rose to the level of those working in agriculture. Through political developments, jobs opened up in active military services such as infantry, mercenary

⁷² Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, *Poverty in the Roman World* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

⁷³ Atkins and Osborne, 2.

⁷⁴ Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 57.

⁷⁵ Atkins and Osborne, *Poverty in the Roman World*, 4.

troops, and rowers. During the times of good harvest, the able-bodied were able to gather resources from land that was beyond cultivation and could consume or sell what was gathered. The chances of an able-bodied individual going into poverty was dependent on circumstances that were sometimes out of their control, such as irregular work and income.⁷⁶

During times of scarcity, those who did not have a full storehouse had to pay high prices for food in the market. There was a temptation for those who could no longer afford to buy food to sell themselves or their children into slavery.⁷⁷ The disabled lived in constant poverty. They were left to rely on charity from family members, friends, and strangers. When they ran out of assistance from these sources where they lived, they would move to seek help in other places. For the disabled, poverty was a structural issue. Political status was more important than wealth in Greek city-states, which meant that in order to be a citizen, the individual would have to have political status. As a result, the poor were not citizens and did not partake in the sharing of city resources or the sharing of grain during times of crisis in the land.⁷⁸

Those in power used their status and wealth to manipulate and oppress the poor. Researcher and lecturer Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, a professor of Ancient History, explain,

In Rome, as in all the other ancient republics, the poor people were constantly in debt to the rich and the great, who in order to secure their votes at the annual elections, used to lend them money at exorbitant interest, which being never paid, soon accumulated into a sum too great either for the debtor to pay, or for anyone else to pay for him. The debtor, for fear of a very severe execution, was obliged, without any further gratuity, to vote for the candidate whom the creditor recommended.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Atkins and Osborne, 4–5.

⁷⁷ Atkins and Osborne, 5.

⁷⁸ Atkins and Osborne, 6.

⁷⁹ Atkins and Osborne, 22.

Poverty was a structural issue for some and a circumstance issue for others. The Roman Empire lacked organized relief for the poor and destitute and there are those who believe that the pagan world felt saddened and repulsed by beggars, yet did nothing. There was no sanctioned almsgiving which made begging ineffective.⁸⁰ The coming of Christ and early Christianity, brought about a new way of viewing the poor and brought value and identity to the poor and needy.

Jesus' Ministry

In the Book of Luke, Jesus made His public proclamation of His own ministry. Luke writes:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'⁸¹

Jesus was not only calling for the deliverance of the oppression and poverty of the poor but also their need for salvation and spiritual restoration.⁸² Carroll, an author, professor, and sociologist, explains, "In the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus pictures the 'today' of fulfillment as divine succor for the poor, the captive, the oppressed, and the blind."⁸³

⁸⁰ Atkins and Osborne, 60.

⁸¹ Luke 4:16-21.

⁸² Paul Hertig, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversals of Fortunes," 1998, 174. Accessed December 21, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969802600206>.

⁸³ John T. Carroll and Jennifer K. Cox, *Luke: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 113.

The teaching in Nazareth is one of Jesus' first teachings after being baptized and having the Spirit come upon Him. The teaching provides the reader with two revelations. The first is that Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture. The second flips the focus from those in power over those in need to the poor and oppressed. Carroll, argues, "This inaugural episode is laced with theological concerns that bear great importance in Luke's narrative. Jesus' Messianic vocation is developed with the aid of several significant associations: empowerment by the Spirit of God; fulfillment of Scripture; the prophetic role; a mission of deliverance for the marginalized, the needy, and outsiders; and resulting rejection by well-placed insiders."⁸⁴

From this point on in His ministry, Jesus continued to carry out the mission to reach the poor, the oppressed, and the blind. Carroll writes: "He will embody the message he read from Isaiah chapter 61 on this Sabbath day. This is what his messianic anointing means. As the one who speaks definitively on behalf of God, he also accepts the role – and the destiny – of prophet. The year of divine acceptance may have arrived, but that does not carry with it the prophet's acceptance among his own people."⁸⁵

Carroll further adds: "In this text Jesus identifies several aspects of His mission. He says He has been sent to release the captives, heal the blind and free the oppressed. That this is a fundamental part of His total mission is beyond question. But Jesus does not equate the task of helping the oppressed with preaching the Gospel to the poor. Nor does Jesus say one task is more important than another. They are both important, but they are also distinct."⁸⁶ Jesus is not doing one or the other; He is doing both jointly. He brings aid to and evangelizes those in need.

⁸⁴ Carroll and Cox, 13.

⁸⁵ Carroll and Cox, 113.

⁸⁶ Ronald J. Sider and John R.W. Stott, *Evangelism, Salvation and Social Justice*, Grove Booklet on Ethics; No. 16 (Bramcote, Nots: Grove Books, 1977), 258.

The Gospel of Luke has strong themes of social consciousness. Craddock, distinguished professor at Candler School of Theology at Emory University and director of the Craddock Center, a non-profit service group which operates in rural Appalachia argues, “Perhaps the characteristic of Luke’s Gospel most commonly known and remarked upon is his attention to and evident concern for the oppressed and marginalized persons in society.”⁸⁷ Luke spoke about the dealings of the rich and poor throughout his Gospel.⁸⁸ Jesus is seen befriending the poor and using social and religious outsiders as positive examples.⁸⁹

During Jesus’ day, as the rich continued to get richer, the sinful desire for more plagued some of the hearts of the rich. This was evident in the interaction that Jesus had with Barnabas. Barnabas was a rich young ruler who asked Jesus how he could gain eternal life. Jesus’ instruction was that Barnabas needed to sell all he had and give it to the poor. Aymer, New Testament scholar and ordained minister, explains: “These instructions seek to remediate economic practices that consign the majority of the people to poverty. Discipleship that forbids the oppression of the poor, protects these who are also amongst the least. Jesus’ teaching about wealth runs counter to the prevailing notions of wealth in Mark’s day.”⁹⁰

Jesus cared for the physical and spiritual needs of the poor throughout His ministry. Jesus fed people both physically with food and fed them spiritually through His teachings and sermons. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus fed the five thousand. Jesus was in a village healing the sick; He then withdrew from them, but they followed Him, and the disciples told Jesus that

⁸⁷ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 1014.

⁸⁸ Luke 4:18; 6:17, 24; 7:22; 12:13-21; 14: 15-24; 16: 1-31; 18: 18-29; 21:1-4.

⁸⁹ Luke 7:36-50; 10:29-37; 17:11-19; 18:9-14; 19:1-10.

⁹⁰ Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sanchez, *The Gospel and Acts: Fortress Commentary on the Bible Study Edition* (1517 Media, 2016), 199.

He needed to send the people away so that they could go to the villages and buy food for themselves. But Jesus had a different plan. He had the disciples make the people sit down, and Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fish and looked to heaven, blessed, and broke the bread and had the disciples pass the food out to all who were there.⁹¹

Another feeding occurred in the next chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. On this occasion, Jesus fed four thousand. The Scripture declares that there was a crowd that followed Jesus for three days, and they had nothing to eat. Jesus did not want to send them away hungry because some may faint from hunger. Jesus asked the disciples what food was available, and they told Him they had seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. Jesus again gave thanks, broke the bread, and had the disciples pass out the food. After they had passed out the food, there were still seven baskets of food left over.⁹²

Jesus did not care about the socioeconomic class of those who were there. He simply provided them with physical food and provided them with the Word of God. Jesus cared about meeting the holistic needs of the individual. There are other instances in which Jesus specifically commanded His followers to take care of the needy. The Gospel of Matthew records the story of the rich young ruler who wanted to know how to obtain eternal life. Jesus replied: "... if you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me."⁹³ The Gospel of Luke records that Jesus explained that when you feed and care for strangers, you also are caring for Him.⁹⁴ Jesus desired the inclusion of the

⁹¹ Matthew 14:13-21.

⁹² Matthew 15:29-39.

⁹³ Matthew 19:21.

⁹⁴ Matthew 25:35-40.

poor and instructed those who are putting on a banquet not to put on a banquet for the rich but to invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.”⁹⁵

Again, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus explains that when His followers provide food, drink, clothing, care for the sick, visits the poor, or welcome in the stranger, they were doing it for Him and that they will be blessed.⁹⁶ Jesus also commanded His followers to sell everything and give it to the poor. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus is quoted as telling someone to, “...sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”⁹⁷

Despite all of Jesus’ generosity and care for the poor, in three out of the four Gospels, Jesus made a statement that could lead a reader towards an impression that the poor and disadvantaged are not a priority. In the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, and John, a woman came to a home in Bethany where Jesus and His disciples were being hosted. While Jesus was at the table a woman came to him with a jar of expensive perfume. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, the woman anointed His head with the perfume. John and Luke further state the woman anointed His feet. In the books of Matthew, Mark, and John, a guest at the gathering was outraged at the actions of the woman. In response to the outrage, Jesus pointed out that the poor will always be among you, but you will not always have me.⁹⁸ Jesus was not making the suggestion that the poor are not important. Kruse, Bible commentator and senior lecturer in New Testament at the Melbourne School of Theology, argues that, “There was no need to reproach Mary for the extravagance of her devotion. There would be no shortage of opportunities for them to do good

⁹⁵ Luke 14:13.

⁹⁶ Matthew 25: 40-45.

⁹⁷ Matthew 19:21.

⁹⁸ Mark 14:7, Matthew 26:11, John 12:8.

to the poor. Acts of devotion and acts of compassion are not mutually exclusive. He also reminded them the time for expressions of devotion was growing short: they would not always ‘have’ him in the way they had him at that time.”⁹⁹

The recording of this interaction was different in the Gospel of Luke. When the woman was washing the feet of Jesus, a Pharisee said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner.”¹⁰⁰ Jesus responds to the doubt of the Pharisee with a parable about the cancellation of debt for two people. One of the debtors owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither debtor had the money to pay back the moneylender, so the moneylender forgave both debts. Jesus ends His story with a question: which one of the debtors would love the moneylender more. Simon responded, the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.¹⁰¹ Carroll explains, “Effective choreography now heightens the contrast between the Pharisee host and uninvited guest on which the parable is commenting. While turning to the woman, Jesus addresses to Simon a speech that defends her honor and, at the same time, shames him with a stinging rebuke.”¹⁰² Jesus concludes by announcing the forgiveness of her sins first to Simon, then to the woman.

While the story in the Gospel of Luke is different than the account in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, one element is consistent. The outcast and the poor are important to Jesus, therefore the poor need to be important to His followers. Worshipping and giving honor to Him, serving others, and welcoming the outsider is the calling of the believer. By doing these

⁹⁹ Colin G. Kruse, *John*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2008), 260.

¹⁰⁰ Luke 7:39.

¹⁰¹ Luke 7:41-43.

¹⁰² John T. Carroll, *Luke (2012): A Commentary* (Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 178.

actions, the believer is following the two greatest commandments, to love God and to love others.

The response that Jesus made has the potential to be interpreted in the same way that the poor are sometimes viewed now. This view is that the poor should work and take care of themselves. Paul's command to the church of Thessalonica could be viewed as an opposition of this view. Paul wrote, "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'the one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.'"¹⁰³ Paul was not condemning individuals struggling with poverty but instead was providing an incentive for believers to work. Martin, a biblical scholar and commentator on the 2 Thessalonians argues: "The saying addresses the case of one who is able but unwilling to work, not the person who is willing but unable to work."¹⁰⁴ Individuals living in poverty many times have issues that are out of their control such as mental health, disability, or limited income.

The Early Church

The Early Church was active within the communities in which they lived. Part of the growth of the Christian movement came from their compassion and outreach. There was a direct correlation between caring for the poor and the growth of the Kingdom of God. Conversely, the growth of the Kingdom of God resulted in the furthering care for the poor. The Early Church fathers shared similar beliefs. John Chrysostom noted, "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but

¹⁰³ 2 Thessalonians 3:10—12.

¹⁰⁴ Michael D. Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, (B&H Publishing Group, 1995), 248.

theirs.” He also wrote: “The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity.”¹⁰⁵

Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the Corinthians, but the letter is not part of the Canon. In this letter, Clement writes: “Let not the strong neglect the weak; and let the weak respect the strong. Let the rich minister aid the poor; and let the poor give thanks to God, because He hath given him one through whom his wants may be supplied.”¹⁰⁶ Augustine was an influential church father who also spoke of the importance of giving to the poor. In a sermon, Augustine examined Matthew 25 and argued that giving to the poor is a major criterion for receiving eternal life.¹⁰⁷ As Bishop, Augustine not only had sacramental duties, he was also in charge of taking care of the poor. Harmless explains that, “He was expected to ensure that the poor, especially widows and orphans, received the church’s aid. Augustine’s world had nothing like a welfare system or social security. Churches around the Empire clothed and fed, on a daily basis, large numbers of dependents.”¹⁰⁸ Augustine cared for the poor through his preaching and through his own actions.

Takanori Inoue, a PhD student who explored the early church’s approach to the poor in society, found that, “By building networks in the love of God and ministering to neighbors in need, the church (and each Christian) could encourage and support each other, and serve spiritually and physically, in various parts of the society where each Christian lives. Thus, more

¹⁰⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 2446.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Clement 38:2.

¹⁰⁷ Edmond Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, New York: New York City Press, 1995), 409–10.

¹⁰⁸ William Harmless, *Augustine in His Own Words*, 1st ed. (Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 79.

people would come to realize the love of God.”¹⁰⁹ While service to the poor does not guarantee salvation, only the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord, the repentance of sin, and the acceptance of God’s grace is the only path to salvation. Giving to the poor is a response to God’s grace and displays obedience to His commands.

Acts

While in the Gospel of Luke there was an emphasis to care for the poor, this emphasis extends into Luke’s account in the Book of Acts as well. The author of Acts reports that, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”¹¹⁰

They valued fellowship, and this did not just include fellow Christians, but also those in need. Bradley, an American Religion educator, writes:

While Christian fellowship can take on many characteristics, in this context such sharing manifests itself in the early community’s practice of having all things in common. It was not uncommon for ancients to describe a community’s origins in ideal terms, which include communal sharing. Given the formulaic character of such communal societies, some might be suspicious of the strict historical accuracy of Luke’s description. Still, a community of sharing where people give to others ‘as any had need’ is a goal, idealized or not, to which the covenant community of God’s people should strive.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Takanori Inoue, “The Early Church’s Approach to the Poor in Society and Its Significance to the Church’s Social Engagement Today,” 2017, 14. Accessed December 21, 2021. <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/firstfruitspapers/74>.

¹¹⁰ Acts 2:42-45.

¹¹¹ J. Bradley Chance, *Acts*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2007), 59.

A similar theme of communal living and caring for the poor is found in Acts chapter 2.

Luke writes,

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claiming that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.¹¹²

These two Scriptures display a concept of unity, fellowship, and sharing. Polhill, professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, explains that,

This served as the basis of their sharing of their possessions. The latter is described in two ways. First, "no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own." The picture is one of unqualified sharing, of not claiming owner's rights, of saying 'what's mine is yours.' The second expression is 'they shared everything they had.' The Greek literally reads 'everything was in common with them.' Taken by itself, this could refer to shared ownership; but in conjunction with the first expression, it also refers to a practice of freely sharing one's goods with another.¹¹³

Throughout the Book of Acts, there were members of the Early Church who would sell all they had to give to the poor. The members publicly preached the Gospel and healed the sick and blind. These miracles were signs that pointed to Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Early Church saw an increase in Christ-followers partly because of the work they were doing in the community. Caring for others and preaching the Gospel is a theme in the Book of Acts. There are lessons and examples that can be gleaned from this in the search for how to most effectively use the resources with which God has blessed His people to love, minister, and care for those in need.

The disciples also commissioned other leaders to care for the poor. The Hellenistic Jews brought to the attention of the disciples that the widows were being overlooked in the daily

¹¹² Acts 2:42-35.

¹¹³ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 135.

distribution of food. In the Jewish society widows, particularly Hellenist widows were especially needy and needed charity. Polhill explains, “The Hellenist widows may have been a particularly sizable group. Diaspora Jews often moved to Jerusalem in their twilight years to die in the holy city. When the men died, their widows were left far from their former home and family to care for them and were thus particularly in need of charity. Many of them may have been attracted to the Christian community precisely because of its concern for the material needs of its members.”¹¹⁴

The Apostles did not feel like it would be a wise decision to focus their attention and energy on the feeding programs rather than the preaching of the Gospel, so instead they chose seven leaders to be responsible to ensure that those in need were taken care of. The Apostles found that the Hellenists believers would be a best fit to care for those who were asking for help because this group already felt that they were being discriminated against. The requirements were that the seven they would elect were to have a trusted and good reputation and full of the Spirit and of wisdom.¹¹⁵ Two of the men were figures we continue to read about in Scripture. Stephen, who became the first martyr, and Philip, would later perform miracles and became instrumental in widespread conversions,¹¹⁶ he would later be called Philip the evangelist.¹¹⁷

The seven men that were chosen were appointed by the Apostles to wait on tables. Faw, professor of theology, missionary, and author, explains that,

It is not clear just what is meant. Traditionally these have been taken to refer to the tables at which people eat and the serving to refer to actual waiting on such tables or supervising such work. There is a strong possibility, however, that the reference is to money tables. The term is used in Mark 11:15 to refer to the place where money is counted and disbursed. Acts (4:35, 37;

¹¹⁴ Polhill, Acts, 168.

¹¹⁵ Chalmer E. Faw, *Acts*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 88.

¹¹⁶ Acts 8: 4-40.

¹¹⁷ Acts 21:8.

5:2) speaks of funds being brought and laid at the apostles' feet. Thus, the task of the seven is to assist the apostles in social services.¹¹⁸

The Apostles found the work of caring for the poor a priority. Therefore, they ensured the necessary work was being done. The Apostles of the Early Church did not just check a box by appointing just anyone; they ensured that the leaders were well equipped and had the ability to lead others in the work of caring for the poor. The model of the apostles can be a model for the Body of Christ today as well. Christians have the responsibility to commission church leaders and non-profit leaders to meet the needs in their communities.

The Epistle of James also speaks of the importance of caring for the poor. James wrote: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”¹¹⁹ Prior to this fundamental verse, James is explaining that it is not enough to just listen to the Word, but the Word of God must also be lived out. The command of James to look after the poor and the orphan is not him summarizing that this is all true worship should involve. James is explaining that religion without following its commands is nothing. Once God’s Word is heard, it must be done. The verse strikes similarities to the verses in the Book of Isaiah when he declares that God will not recognize the people’s worship if they are not doing right and seeking justice and caring for the helpless.¹²⁰ Moo, a New Testament scholar and professor, writes that “Christians whose religion is pure and faultless will imitate their Father by intervening to help the helpless. Those who suffer from want in the Two-thirds World, in the inner city; those who are unemployed and

¹¹⁸ Faw, 88.

¹¹⁹ James 1:27.

¹²⁰ Isaiah 1:16-17.

penniless; those who are inadequately represented in government or in law – These are the people who should see abundant evidence of Christians ‘pure religion’.”¹²¹

In the Book of James, the author condemns favoritism and provides a situation that may be hypothetical. He speaks of the issue in serious terms which suggests that he knows the behavior is occurring. James writes:

“Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?”¹²²

James reminds his readers that believers should not evaluate people by the standards of the world. The readers should not heap honor on those who are persecuting the poor over the poor themselves. During the time of the early church, the rich were exploiting the poor for their own gain. Moo argues that, “The strongly marked socio-economic class distinction presupposed in James corresponds closely to what we know of conditions in first-century Palestine. A small group of wealthy landowners and merchants accumulated more and more power, while large numbers of people were forced from their land and grew even poorer. Most of James’ readers probably belonged to this class of poor agricultural laborers.”¹²³ James explains that the rich are blaspheming the name of God by persecuting the poor who bear His name and wants to show them their foolishness in providing preferential treatment to those who are persecuting the poor.

¹²¹ Douglas J. Moo, *James*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2009), 117.

¹²² James 2:2-6.

¹²³ Moo, 125.

James continues with another reminder that Christians should not only use their words, but that their words should be followed with action. James writes: “If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well’, but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is that? So also, faith of itself, if it does not have the works, is dead.”¹²⁴ Moo adds that, “The warning is one that the church needs constantly to hear. Too often we have been content to offer mere words when God may have been calling us to action. Words – sermons, prayers, confessions of faith, wise advice, encouragement – are indispensable to true Christianity. But they are shown to have real meaning, James reminds us, when people can see actions that correspond to those words.”¹²⁵ The faith of Christians should lead towards action, especially when it comes to advocating for the poor.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

Through examining both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Scriptures reveal the Holy Spirit’s presence, led those of influence to advocate for the poor. The Holy Spirit provided both wisdom and empowerment for those who were influencers of their day. The Holy Spirit is known by many names throughout Scripture. He is referred to as “Comforter,”¹²⁶ “Power of the Highest,”¹²⁷ “Spirit of truth,”¹²⁸ “Helper,”¹²⁹ and the list goes on. The Holy Spirit is essential in

¹²⁴ James 2:15-17.

¹²⁵ Moo, 136.

¹²⁶ John 14:16 (KJV).

¹²⁷ Luke 1:35.

¹²⁸ John 14:16-17.

¹²⁹ John 14:26.

the life of the believer and is vital to the success of the leader. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declared: “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”¹³⁰ Jesus telling the disciples that they will do even greater things is a bold, humbling, and awe-inspiring statement, especially in light of what He did for the poor. However, leaders cannot be deceived by thinking these things will be done in their own strength. God looks for humble and willing leaders to accomplish “these greater things”, which reside in His will and plan, through the power of the Spirit.

Sweet, an American theologian, church historian, author, and professor, writes: “Call the Holy Spirit ‘Coach Ghost,’ as I like to do or call the Holy Spirit, as Augustine did, *Donum Dei* (‘Gift of God’). No matter the name, the function of the Spirit is to help us turn every corner and face every fork in the road. Every follower’s life, in fact, is a Ghost story, as the Spirit continually leads us where we do not want to go, where we had no intention of traveling.”¹³¹ The Spirit is calling leaders to enter areas where Christ was not able to go during His time on earth in order to help have a meaningful impact on those who are disenfranchised and in need.

Jesus promised His disciples an aptitude for power that would come from the Holy Spirit. Jesus declared: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.”¹³² The “Helper” Jesus is referring to is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s role in the life of the believer is an important part of the believer’s ministry. The job of feeding

¹³⁰ John 14:12-14.

¹³¹ Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 201.

¹³² John 14:16.

the poor is empowered and advocated through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is seeking obedience and is providing power for those who are desiring to meet the needs of those who are crying out to Him.

Holy Spirit: The One who empowers

Socioeconomic status, age, abilities, and education should not get in the way of those who seek to serve the poor because the Holy Spirit has shown He empowers all who are willing to serve. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the disciples were filled with the Spirit during the Feast of Pentecost. What seemed like tongues of fire came down and rested on each of the disciples. The Bible states that, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”¹³³ Following this experience, led by Peter, the disciples began to share with the crowd outside of the building where they had been assembled. Some of the people in the crowd suspected them of being drunk, and Peter reminded them of what was spoken by the prophet Joel, which says: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”¹³⁴ Peter was aware that the days of the outpouring of the Spirit were upon humanity. From then on, the Holy Spirit was to be poured upon all people, young and old, male, and female, the wealthy, the economically disenfranchised, and the oppressed. Despite social class, age, or gender, they were all empowered to proclaim the name of Jesus. The Holy Spirit does impart power to those who are doing the work of the Father, and just

¹³³ Acts 2:1-4.

¹³⁴ Acts 3:17-18.

like with the disciples, some who are served by His followers may be actively living in a life of sin.

Soon after, in the next chapter of Acts, Peter and John are found shamelessly confessing Christ when having to give an account to the elders and the teachers of the law. After boldly professing that Jesus is the only One who can save, the Scriptures report the reaction of those listening: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”¹³⁵ The indwelling of the Holy Spirit turned these unschooled and ordinary men and women into courageous and bold leaders. The Holy Spirit does not need educated individuals to feed and evangelize the poor. He just needs willing servants!

The Holy Spirit provides leaders with the ability to bring God’s will to completion. Today’s leader must be filled with the Spirit in order to fully accomplish the tasks that God has given them to undertake. Through God’s Spirit, people can accomplish greater things than they ever dreamed, hope, or even imagined. Through reliance on the Spirit, nothing is impossible to those who believe and the power that resides in the believer through the Holy Spirit can create a dramatic change for those in need.

Holy Spirit: The mover

The Holy Spirit moves people into areas that may not be safe, and that may place them outside of their comfort zone. Going into areas of suffering may not feel comfortable to all believers. Paul was led to areas for the sake of the Gospel that presented threats. For some, God will call them to move into areas that may be dangerous and may seem insane for those around them. There are

¹³⁵ Acts 4:13.

ministries that are centered around missional living, where believers move into a neighborhood in order to know, love, and serve that community, with a mission to share the Gospel and disciple those in the community.

Throughout Scripture, there are examples of the Holy Spirit actively leading leaders into the face of danger. Acts 20:22-24 says: “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the tasks the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”¹³⁶ Going to Jerusalem was not the only time Paul was brought into dangerous situations. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, Paul is getting ready to be called before the court. Back at his quarters, Paul writes, “At my first defense no one took my part; all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength.”¹³⁷

A life of leadership for the Kingdom of God can move the believer away from what he/she is comfortable with in order to make a difference in areas of great need, but in all circumstances the Spirit sustains the believer even in the very hour of their death. Zehr, an urban pastor and author, writes that,

Despite the absence of support by fellow workers, Paul has experienced the presence of the living Lord. Amid dire circumstances, the Lord has done two things for Paul. First, the Lord stood by him and gave him strength. The Lord’s strength made it possible to use imprisonment at Rome in such a way that through Paul the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it. The missionary task of the church does not end with imprisonment. Despite prosecution and imprisonment, God has worked through Paul to bring the good news of salvation to the Gentiles.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Acts 20:22-24.

¹³⁷ 2 Timothy 4:16-17.

¹³⁸ Paul M. Zehr, *1 & 2 Timothy Titus* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1936), 228.

Just like Paul, the believer can be confident that whatever challenge the Holy Spirit is leading the believer towards, He will always be there to provide strength and comfort at the moment when there seems to be no hope and when all others have left. Sweet writes that, “Life in the Spirit involves not only breathing but also moving, seeing, and listening. The Spirit breathes within us, moves among us, reveals to us. As God moves us through life and his(story), we sail as pneumanauts on the edges of the wind. And in life, as in sailing, we are always moving into new horizons. In God and in Christ, we are always looking forward.”¹³⁹ While the poor will always be here, it is the job of the Christian to be proactive in seeking out the poor to meet them at their place of need.

Just as Jesus and the Apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News, the Spirit equips today’s Christian and provides the confidence to speak God’s truth and do His work. Author and pastor Timothy Keller examined how God equips His leaders. He explains:

You may not have strong public-speaking gifts, but if you are godly, your wisdom and love and courage will make you an interesting preacher. You may not have strong pastoral or counseling gifts, but if you are godly, your wisdom and love and courage will enable you to comfort and guide people. You may not have strong leadership gifts, but if you are godly, your wisdom and love and courage will mean that people will respect and follow you.¹⁴⁰

God is not asking the believer to be perfect in any or all aspects of ministry, but to be godly. Through godliness and obedience, the Holy Spirit will fill in the gaps and work through individuals to accomplish God’s will.

¹³⁹ Sweet, *I Am a Follower*, 234.

¹⁴⁰ Timothy Keller. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), Kindle Edition, loc. 2407.

Theological Debates

Imago Dei

The Old Testament and the New Testament are filled with mandates for believers to care for the poor, both physically and spiritually. Ethna Regan, lecturer in theology at the Mater Dei Institute of Education in Dublin City University, argues that, “The ultimate theological justification for engagement with human rights is the doctrine of *Imago Dei*.”¹⁴¹ The Book of Genesis says, “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female He created them.”¹⁴² God created every human in His image; therefore, all humans have intrinsic value and, because of that deserve the aid of others when in need. Regan explains: “Whereas the concept of human rights is not explicitly present in the Torah, Judaism points theology toward the concept of inalienable human dignity based on the ‘astonishing assertion’ that God created human beings in God’s image.”¹⁴³ Murray Dempster, Distinguished Professor of Social Ethics supports the *Imago Dei* as an Old Testament theological foundation for caring for the poor. Dempster points out that God has revealed himself and His character through Old Testament Scripture where God has shown his concern for the poor and the oppressed. *Imago Dei* obliges human beings to value all human beings because they are all created in His image, therefore, care for the oppressed

¹⁴¹ Ethna. Regan, *Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights*, 1, online resource (xii, 243 pages) vols. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010). Accessed December 21, 2020. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=547822>.

¹⁴² Genesis 1:27.

¹⁴³ Regan, *Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights*.

should move people to provide respect and dignity to all other human beings because they are made in His image.¹⁴⁴

Theologians have different interpretations of *Imago Dei*. The three views are relational, functional, and substantive. Karl Barth roots his interpretation of the *Imago Dei* in a Christological context and views it as relational. Barth summarizes his interpretation in this fashion:

In God's own being and sphere there is a counterpart: a genuine but harmonious self-encounter and self-discovery; a free co-existence and co-operation; an open confrontation and reciprocity. Man is the repetition of this divine form of life; its copy and reflection. He is this first in the fact that he is a counterpart of God, the encounter and discovery in God Himself being copied and imitated in God's relation to man. But he is it also in the fact that he is himself the counterpart of his fellows and has in them a counterpart, the co-existence and co-operation in God Himself being repeated in the relation of man to man. Thus, the *tertium compartationis*, the analogy between God and man, is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation.¹⁴⁵

Augustine, for his part, views *Imago Dei* through a substantive lens. Augustine believes that man is made in the image of the triune God, not in the form of the body but in the formation of the soul. Augustine states: "...but the image of the Creator that has been implanted immortally in its own immortality must be found in the human soul, that is in the rational or intellectual soul."¹⁴⁶ Augustine explains that the ability to reason and understand sets humankind above the rest of creation. He further writes: "But we must first consider the mind in itself before it is a partaker of God, and before His image is to be found in it. For we have said that, even though it has become impaired and disfigured by the loss of its participation in God, it nonetheless remains an image of God. For it is His image by the very fact that it is capable of Him, and can be a

¹⁴⁴ Murray W. Dempster, "Pentecostal Social Concern and the Biblical Mandate of Social Justice," *Pneuma* 9, no. 1 (1987): 129–53. Accessed April 22, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007487X00137>.

¹⁴⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, I/1 - IV/4*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas Forsyth (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 185.

¹⁴⁶ Harmless, *Augustine in His Own Words*, 307.

partaker of Him; and it cannot be so great a good except that it is His image.”¹⁴⁷ Augustine points out that the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden corrupted the image of God, but through the redemption that came from Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, the image of God in man was renewed. Through Jesus death and resurrection, we were made right with God.

Thomas Aquinas shares similarities with Augustine’s view of being made in the image of God. Aquinas believes that man was created good and was made with a moral likeness. Through the fall the moral likeness was corrupted by sin and it was through the supernatural work of God through Christ that the moral likeness may be restored. Aquinas points out that man’s intellect and ability to speak are part of God’s image given to man. He says, “It is clear, therefore, that intellectual creatures alone, properly speaking, are made to God’s image.”¹⁴⁸ Aquinas goes on to explain that the image of God is seen through man’s ability to understand and love God. Aquinas writes: “Firstly, because man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly, because man actually or habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, because man knows and loves God perfectly and this image consists in the likeness of glory.”¹⁴⁹

Clines, another theologian, originally viewed Imago Dei through a functional perspective. Clines argues, “As far as concerns this aspect of the image, namely that it denotes the corporeal existence of man, we have to stress that what makes man the image of God is not that corporeal

¹⁴⁷ Harmless, *Augustine in His Own Words*, 307.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica I The Complete Edition* (Washington, DC: Catholic Way Publishing, n.d.). Location 20404, Kindle.

¹⁴⁹ Aquinas. Location 20479, Kindle.

man stands as an analogy of a corporeal God; for the image does not primarily mean similarity, but the representation of the one who is imaged in a place where he is not.”¹⁵⁰

For Clines the Ancient Near Eastern view matches his own understanding of image. The Ancient Near Eastern view believes that man is created to be the gods’ servants and to relieve others from their toil. After being made in the image of “the God,” they remain the image of “the God” despite all other circumstances. Clines shares that, to the Christian’s perspective, once God made humanity in the image of Himself, nothing, not even the fall of humanity could take that away.¹⁵¹

Through his exploration of the New Testament, Cline shifts his view to a substantive interpretation through New Testament study. Through study of the New Testament, he finds that Christ is the true image of God. Clines explains that,

As the second man, the last Adam, Jesus is to perfection the image of God. From Christ, ‘who is the likeness of God’, streams ‘the gospel light of Christ’s glory’, which is hidden to unbelievers; but believers see the ‘light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Christ’ (2 Cor. 4:4). He is ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col. 1:15); therefore, ‘he who has seen me has seen the Father’ (Jn. 12:45; 14:9); He is also the firstborn of all creation, i.e., the image of God, who is Son of God (‘beloved son’, Col. 1:13, and to whom authority over all created things is given.¹⁵²

Clines sees the image of Christ as an eschatological concept. The “now” and the “not yet” are birthed out of that concept. We are children of God now but are not yet what we shall be in when He returns.

In summary, those who side with the substantive view believe that humans are created with the characteristics or qualities of God. Those who side with the relational view believe that

¹⁵⁰ D.J.A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin*, Tyndale Old Testament Lecture, no. 19 (1967): 87.

¹⁵¹ Clines, 99–100.

¹⁵² D.J.A. Clines, *Image of God*. In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. G.F. Hawthorne (Illinois: Downers Grove, 1993), 427.

the image of God means that humanity has the capacity to have relationship with God. Those who lean towards the functional view believe that the image of God is tied to what humans do or how they perform. Despite the opposing views, if humankind was made to be in relationship with God and have the characteristics and qualities of God, then it is humankind's responsibility to see others as image bearers and care for them the same way Christ cared for those in need. When Christ was asked by a teacher of the law what the most important commandment was, He replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."¹⁵³

Methods of ministry

Jesus made caring for the poor an intentional part of his ministry and commanded His followers to do likewise. Jesus modeled it because it is central to the character of the Kingdom of God.

Ivan Satyavrata, author and pastor in Kolkata, India, argues that "In effect the kingdom mission of Jesus (including his kingdom ethic) is transferred to the charismatic community by the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. The kingdom ethic of Jesus is made operational within the charismatic community by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and becomes thereafter the moral foundation for the life of the early church."¹⁵⁴

While Scripture shows biblical and theological mandates to care for the poor, evolving theology sometimes stood in the way of caring for the poor. Millennial eschatology created a lack of motivation to build the kingdom of God because of its view that the imminent return of

¹⁵³ Mark 12:30-31.

¹⁵⁴ Ivan Satyavrata, "Power to the Poor: Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Social Engagement," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 19, no. 1 (2016): 50.

Christ would happen, and Christians would soon leave the earth prior to an apocalyptic event. Pre-millennialism shifts people's focus from the "here and now" to a "what is to come," which minimized the concern for social engagement. The result of not focusing on the "here and now" can result in the oversight of those who are suffering in the present. Therefore, the poor are overlooked by the Christians who are called to alleviate their suffering.

Next was the rise of the social gospel. The social gospel was a movement led by Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist who worked on behalf of the poor in Hell's Kitchen in New York City. The premise of the social gospel is that social change should be created through the integration of Christian ideals. Washington Gladden, also a key figure in the rise of the social gospel published a book, *Working People and their Employers*, which was viewed as one of the early writings that associated with the social gospel. Evans, an author and professor of church history, explains that, "Gladden did not discount the importance of a personal conversion experience. Yet 'conversion' needed to be defined in a way that encompassed how individuals contributed to a society, whereby social institutions would be structurally altered to conform to the teachings of Jesus and the Gospel."¹⁵⁵

Strong stances or opposition began to rise against liberals that were trying to implement a social gospel. Dualism turned the focus away from the physical benefits of the gospel and shifted the focus to the salvation of the soul. Evangelicals took an apolitical posture and began to distance themselves from anything that seemed politically tainted.¹⁵⁶ Satyavrata, a Pentecostal professor, author, and pastor of one of the largest churches in India argues that "Other challenges included the impact of the prosperity gospel which, by postulating almost a karma-like cause-

¹⁵⁵ Christopher H. Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History* (New York, NY: New York University Press, n.d.), 22.

¹⁵⁶ Ivan Satyavrata, 46.

effect relationship between faith and material wealth, implied that the poor deserve their status. Furthermore, concern for practical social needs was commonly viewed by Pentecostals as a natural inseparable part of evangelism, and hence they never felt the need to develop a distinct theology for it.”¹⁵⁷

Social justice is a subject that, on the surface, everyone may agree with. But once the subject is dug into, it can stir up some conflicts, partly due to political climate and political influence. Vondey, researcher on Pentecostal movements, argues that,

The rise of a sociopolitical critical consciousness among Pentecostals, that is, the Pentecostal attitude toward engagement with social, economic, and political issues is not static. The tensions suggest that Christian formation is highly dependent on existing conditions, dominant cultural perspectives, economic developments, political leadership, religious examples and the corresponding desires for acceptance and effectiveness or reformation and change. Hence, Pentecostal groups exhibit sometimes a radical break and at other times a gradual shift in social consciousness.¹⁵⁸

The preaching of the prosperity gospel, media’s influence, and the economy in North America play a negative role on people’s perception of social justice. Vondey explains that, “Classic Pentecostalism in the United States shows a shift regarding prosperity, consumerism, and capitalism soon after the first generation of the early twentieth century. Original anti-materialism dominated the eschatological mindset of Pentecostal pioneers, who had little time to engage in consumerism while expecting the imminent return of Christ. Pentecostal leaders spoke out clearly against capitalism and materialism.”¹⁵⁹

Another struggle within America, is the struggle with the understanding of privilege. There is a lack of understanding of what privilege means. Nathan Todd, a professor and

¹⁵⁷ Satyavrata, “Power to the Poor”, 47.

¹⁵⁸ Wolfgang Vondey, “The Impact of Culture and Social Justice on Christian Formation in Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 24, no. 2 (July 2015): 212.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

researcher, writes: “Scholars in psychology and community psychology have articulated the need for a deeper understanding of how forms of privilege based on membership in a dominant group (e.g., based on race, gender, sexual orientation) contribute to systems of oppression by conferring advantages to those group members.”¹⁶⁰ It is the responsibility of leaders within Pentecostalism, and any religion that focuses on the teaching of Christ and the apostles, to preach against materialism and consumerism and reject a prosperity gospel, and instead focus on the care of the poor and disenfranchised.

The Pentecostal movement has its roots within social justice. Vondey argues that “One of the most significant, and still dominant, theories describing the emergence of classic Pentecostalism in North America during the twentieth century was the result of the distinct social roots of deprivation. While such theories have been revised to account for the upward mobility of Pentecostals, recent observations continue to support the idea that Pentecostalism essentially flourishes as a religion of the poor while moving its appeal toward the masses.”¹⁶¹

The mission of God is to bring hope, love, and restoration to a fallen world. God desires to be in relationship with His creation since the creation of Adam and Eve. Subsequent to the fall, God has provided ways for man to be in relationship with Him, despite the different obstacles that have gotten in the way. The Gospel of Luke records that, “The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.”¹⁶² Christ was the sacrifice that allowed humanity to be in right

¹⁶⁰ Nathan R. Todd, Elizabeth A. McConnell, and Rachael L. Suffrin, “The Role of Attitudes Toward White Privilege and Religious Beliefs in Predicting Social Justice Interest and Commitment,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 53, no. 1/2 (March 2014): 110. Accessed April 31, 2020.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-014-9630-x>.

¹⁶¹ Vondey, 203.

¹⁶² Luke 19:10.

standing with God again. In response to this, Christians should extend grace, love, and help to the neighbor in need.

Issues from Related Contemporary Literature

Issues affecting the poor in America

The Bureau of Labor Statistics, part of the United States Department of Labor, released the latest definition of the working poor in 2015. The report states that: “The working poor are people who spent at least 27 weeks in the labor force (that is, working or looking for work) but whose incomes still fell below the official poverty level.”¹⁶³ Jeannette Wicks-Lim, a researcher who specializes in labor economics, argues that,

The Economic Policy Institute has an alternative measure of a minimally decent living standard for families with young children, called the ‘Basic Family Budget’. These budgets include: food, clothing, housing, transportation, child care, health care, other necessities (including personal care items), and taxes. These budgets do not allow for any savings – not for retirement, education, or even for emergencies. This Basic Family Budget typically ranges between two and four times the official poverty line, depending on local living costs, and averages at about 2.4. In other words, for the typical family with children, an income level below 240 percent of the FPL [= Federal Poverty Level] would not be enough to meet their basic needs.¹⁶⁴

Economic struggles can hinder other areas of life, especially for the working poor. In adults, the consequences of financial stress can result in harmful health effects. Author Karen Secombe explains that, “Poor adults have significantly higher morbidity and mortality statistics and have a lower life expectancy than other adults. They are more likely to work in dangerous occupations, live in unsafe neighborhoods, and their homes are more likely to be located near

¹⁶³ “A Profile of the Working Poor, 2015: BLS Reports: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.” Accessed April 21, 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/working-poor/2015/home.html>.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

toxic sites.”¹⁶⁵ Financial stressors, such as paying for housing, childcare, debt, education, and emergency needs are highly correlated with health issues and disease.

Financial struggles also affect men and women in their social relationships due to the anxiety and depression the worries may create; the stigmas associated with being poor; the shame or embarrassment that the humiliation may create; the health concerns that arise; and the stressors the needs may put on those around them. Individuals experiencing poverty are less likely to marry, and those who do marry see lower levels of marital happiness and are more likely to have conjugal conflict due to financial insecurity.¹⁶⁶

Mental health issues also rise with these stressors. Working individuals experiencing poverty are more likely to experience poor relationships and mental health issues, caused by financial stressors, such as lack of access to physical and mental health services. Increased health issues create a higher possibility that the poor and working poor will suffer from higher rates of health and mental health problems that may go untreated or unnoticed¹⁶⁷

Children are also affected by poverty. Such children tend to have poor physical health, and experience more chronic health issues. Poverty can result in a lack of healthcare for families, especially during pregnancy and the early years of a child. The lack of prenatal care raises the rates of children being born with low birth weight or even having birth defects. As these children grow, they tend to be surrounded by environmental hazards and lackluster diets.¹⁶⁸ The National Health Interview Survey shows that 68% of children in poor families were reported to be in very

¹⁶⁵ K. Seccombe, “‘Beating the Odds’ Versus ‘Changing the Odds’: Poverty, Resilience, and Family Policy,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*-Minneapolis, 64, no. 2, Part 2 (2002): 386.

¹⁶⁶ Seccombe, “Beating the Odds’ Versus ‘Changing the Odds,’” 386.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 386.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 387.

good or excellent health, which is significantly lower than the 86% of families at or above the poverty line. The lower rate in healthy children living in poverty is linked to poor mothers not having proper prenatal care, with 25% of poor children lacking health insurance, being exposed to environmental hazards, eating diets that do not provide the proper nutrition, and lacking health care access.¹⁶⁹

Food deserts

Despite the government programs and the abundance of food available in the United States, food insecurity is still a major peril to many disenfranchised people, for, according to Alisha Coleman-Jensen, a social science analyst, there exists the "... perceptions of whether the household was able to obtain enough food to meet their needs."¹⁷⁰ In other words, food insecure households are not always sure where their next meal will come from. Alessandro Bonanno and Jing Li explain that, "The link between food insecurity and lack of access is complex, and takes at least two forms. First, households living in areas with limited access to food stores can experience higher search and transportation costs. Second, access to isolated food stores could result in higher prices, either because of the stores' monopolistic position (pricing power), or cost inefficiencies."¹⁷¹

America is a land where food is bountiful. America prides itself on excellent restaurants and great grocery stores. It is hard to turn a corner in major cities without seeing a grocery store.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁷⁰ Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews and Steven Carlson, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2011," United States Department of Agriculture, report 141 (September 2012). Accessed November 25, 2019. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=94848>.

¹⁷¹ Alessandro Bonanno and Jing Li, "Food Insecurity and Food Access in U.S. Metropolitan Areas," *Applied Economic Perspectives & Policy* 37, no. 2 (June 2015): 178. Accessed May 2, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aep/ppo032>.

When food is not sold by the “best buy date,” the food is moved out of stores and restaurants and either disposed of or donated. When food is not used during banquets, such as company dinners and weddings, the leftover food is discarded. Despite the excess, there is still food insecurity. The USDA reports that an estimated 30-40 percent of the food supply in America is wasted. The USDA’s Economic Research Service reported that 31 percent of that food loss comes from both retail and consumer levels which equates to 133 billion pounds and 161 billion dollars’ worth of food in 2010.¹⁷²

The USDA reports further that, “An estimated 11.1 percent of U.S. households were food insecure at least some time during the year in 2018, meaning they lacked access to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.”¹⁷³ How is it that there is so much food available and wasted in America, yet there is still food insecurity? Part of the problem is the lack of food distributors in food deserts. A “food desert” is a geographical area where grocery stores and supermarkets are not close enough for the residents to have access.¹⁷⁴ If an individual or family is living in a food desert, they oftentimes have a hard time accessing affordable and nourishing food, and have to rely on convenience stores, fast food, and have a harder time getting fresh fruits and vegetables.¹⁷⁵

There are also “food swamps.” Melissa Goodman, director of advocacy for the ACLU explains: “... food swamps are defined as areas with an excess of unhealthy foods (e.g., energy-

¹⁷² “Food Waste FAQs,” Accessed November 25, 2019. <https://www.usda.gov/foodwaste/faqs>.

¹⁷³ Alisha Coleman-Jensen, *et al*, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2018.” Accessed November 25, 2019. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=94848>.

¹⁷⁴ Alexander Testa and Dylan B. Jackson, “Food Insecurity, Food Deserts, and Waist-to-Height Ratio: Variation by Sex and Race/Ethnicity,” *Journal of Community Health: The Publication for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention* 44, no. 3 (2019): 444–50. Accessed November 25, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-018-00601-w>.

¹⁷⁵ Testa and Jackson, 445.

dense junk and snack foods) in relation to healthy foods (e.g., fruits and vegetables). Those living in food swamps can become stuck with the choices available because of factors outside of their control.” They go on to say: “A food swamp focus sees plentiful access to high-caloric foods as the key to poor diets. This focus is reflected by zoning policies, such as city ordinances that limit the building of new convenience stores and fast-food restaurants in identified areas.”¹⁷⁶

Families living in food swamps may be used to these foods and be completely unaware of the long-term side effects of their food choices. Fast food restaurants and corner stores have become a norm. While the processed food is easy for them to store, is cheap, and does not need a lot of cooking equipment to make, these foods are not made of high-quality ingredients, being full of sugar and salt. Diseases such as diabetes increase drastically when this is compounded with inactivity due to people living in poverty having very limited access to gym memberships, safe outdoor areas nearby to exercise, and the lack of healthy and high-quality foods.

The children in need

While the adults living in low socioeconomic communities have many struggles, their children are experiencing negative effects during key developmental stages. The strains caused by poverty increase the frequency of child abuse and domestic violence in the home, and lower levels of education and dysfunctional family life may result in a continuing cycle of poverty for the children as they enter adulthood.¹⁷⁷ Life for the fetus is essential but, once those babies are born,

¹⁷⁶ Melissa Goodman, Jessica Thomson, and Alicia Landry, “Food Environment in the Lower Mississippi Delta: Food Deserts, Food Swamps and Hot Spots,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 10 (May 2020). Accessed April 1, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17103354>.

¹⁷⁷ Seccombe, 387.

a good quality of life is also important. Without proper resources, children in these environments get stuck in a cycle of poverty that could be passed on to their children as well.

How poverty affects children

Children born into low-income families are also susceptible to abuse and neglect. Maltreatments have been divided into two main categories: physical abuse and neglect. “Physical abuse often is described as a situation in which a child sustains injury due to the willful acts of an adult.”¹⁷⁸

These harms can be caused by family members inflicting pain on a child through hitting, kicking, or biting, and can be done by using a variety of objects. The key word in the definition is “willful.” Accidents do happen, but when a parent sets out to physically harm a child, the action then becomes abuse.

The other category of maltreatment falls under neglect and comes in the form of lack of readily available food, shelter, or clothing, etc.

Child neglect also can take on many different forms. For instance, a child's nutritional needs can be ignored, resulting in a deficient diet and, in turn, a "failure to thrive." This *nutritional neglect* is not necessarily intentional and may result from a parent's lack of knowledge regarding a healthy diet. *Physical neglect* results when a child is not provided with adequate food, shelter, and clothing. Neglect can also come in the form of inadequate medical care, lack of proper supervision, and lack of educational opportunities. Finally, neglect also includes inadequate emotional care, where a child experiences a continuous lack of response to his or her crying or any other behavior in need of a response.¹⁷⁹

These maltreatments create a lasting effect on the child. The trauma that occurs can stunt developmental cycles and can result in mental health issues and other long-lasting side effects.

¹⁷⁸ Angelika H. Claussen and Patricia M. Crittenden, “Physical and psychological maltreatment: Relations among types of maltreatment,” *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 15, no. 1 (1991). Accessed April 1, 2019. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/014521349190085R>.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-18.

For over 30 years, clinicians have described the effects of child abuse and neglect on the physical, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral development of children. Physical consequences range from minor injuries to severe brain damage and even death. Psychological consequences range from chronic low self-esteem to severe dissociative states. The effects of abuse create cognitive effects that range from attentional problems and learning disorders to severe organic brain syndromes.¹⁸⁰

Abuse and neglect create behavioral consequences that can create extreme violent behaviors.

These behavioral consequences do not only affect the individual, but also the society that these children, and one day adults, live in.

Child abuse and neglect have a dark history in America. Far too long, child abuse went on without any established policies or practices to protect children. Fortunately, today there are laws and social services to protect the children from abuse. Nevertheless, the media is filled with stories of tragedy, in which children have been beaten, exploited, sexually abused, and even killed at the hands of their caregivers.

Small Children and youth are placed into foster care for their protection and well-being. Children's Bureau at Health and Human Service Administration for Children and Families reported,

Of the 3,534,000 million (rounded) children who were the subject of an investigation or alternative response in fiscal year 2018, 678,000 (rounded) children were determined to be victims of maltreatment, up from 674,000 (rounded) victims in 2017. In total, 60.8 percent of victims were neglected, 10.7 percent were physically abused and 7.0 percent were sexually abused. More than 15 percent were victims of two or more maltreatment types.

¹⁸⁰ National Research Council Staff, *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 1993): 208.

Before the 1970s, the only types of abuse that were legally recognized were physical abuse and severe physical neglect of children. At that time maltreatments did not include or address sexual abuse or emotional neglect of children.¹⁸¹

In the 1800s, in the United States, a movement called the House of Refuge started, and *Parens Patriae* was the doctrine that pushed this movement forward to help on behalf of children who were in abusive situations. These situations launched the movement to place children in foster care. These changes were backed by the advancement of psychology and the understanding of the goodness of the children and their need to be in supportive families.¹⁸²

Through efforts to raise awareness by non-profit organizations, cases of extreme abuse of children became more apparent. “In 1875, Henry Bergh helped to establish the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) under the leadership of Elbridge Gerry, and thus began a notable movement to protect children from abuse and neglect.”¹⁸³ By 1900, 250 protective agencies across the country were in place. Child welfare became public policy in the early 1900s. Proceeding from this was the U.S. Children's Bureau in 1912, and then in 1935, the Social Security Act helped strengthen child welfare services and mandated intervention for abused children. The 1960s and 1970s added to the momentum, and in 1974, The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act was passed. Since then, the legislation has continued to progress, and critical laws have passed to help provide services for abused children.

¹⁸¹ Maria Scannapieco and Kelli Connell-Carrick, *Understanding Child Maltreatment: An Ecological and Development Perspective* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6. Accessed April 1, 2019. <https://seu.on.worldcat.org/oclc/61395521>.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 8.

The effects of maltreatments amongst American Families have started to create a trend towards preventions, and on February 9, 2018, The Family First Prevention Services Act was signed and became law.

This act reforms the federal child welfare financing streams, Title IV-E and Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, to provide services to families who are at risk of entering the child welfare system. The bill aims to prevent children from entering foster care by allowing federal reimbursement for mental health services, substance use treatment, and in-home parenting skill training. It also seeks to improve the well-being of children already in foster care by incentivizing states to reduce placement of children in congregate care.¹⁸⁴

The Department of Children and Families has sought to find ways to track a reduction in maltreatments after a family has had their first intervention by a Child Protection Investigator, but this is no longer enough. Matthew Stagner, a nationally known expert on youth development and risk behaviors, writes: "...the traditional response aims to prevent a recurrence of maltreatment once it has already taken place, the new framework focuses on preventing maltreatment from occurring at all."¹⁸⁵ The welfare system is striving to discover ways to keep families out of the child welfare system altogether. The area of prevention can help children from experiencing trauma created by abuse and neglect. The answer can certainly be the church, as the church continues to step in to provide resources to disenfranchised communities.

Holistic approaches to serving individuals experiencing poverty

Contemporary literature has created discussions on how to ensure that the good work of benevolence programs is creating opportunities to those they are helping to move from a position

¹⁸⁴ Kristen Torres, Richa Mathur, "Fact Sheet: Family First Prevention Services Act." Accessed April 21, 2018. <https://campaignforchildren.org/resources/fact-sheet/fact-sheet-family-first-prevention-services-act/>.

¹⁸⁵ Matthew W. Stagner and Jiffy Lansing, "Progress Toward a Prevention Perspective," *Future of Children* 19, no. 2 (2015): 1.

of need to a position of thriving. Researchers have explored the dangers of providing care for those in need without also addressing the root issues that have caused them to be in such situations. These resources can help shape the way Christians serve their communities.

Robert D. Lupton, Founder and President of FCS Urban Ministries, provides some thoughts on betterment and development. In his book, *Toxic Charity*, Lupton wrote: “Betterment does for others. Development maintains the long view and looks to enable others to do for themselves. Betterment improves conditions. Development strengthens capacity. Betterment gives a man a fish. Development teaches a man how to fish.”¹⁸⁶ Lupton points out that the “compassion industry” is widely accepted as a worthwhile endeavor, even though the outcomes of that endeavor are largely unexamined and may be doing more harm than good.¹⁸⁷ Lupton argues that, while compassion initiatives may provide an immediate good, they may end up doing long-term harm by creating dependency, because “when we do for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we disempower them.”¹⁸⁸ This writer has seen disempowerment through a lot of charity-giving within communities throughout Florida. The disempowerment has even been seen in different efforts in which the writer has participated.

Robert Lupton challenges his readers to evaluate their charity for signs that the work being done is bringing more hurt than help. He writes:

Why do we miss this crucial aspect in evaluating our charitable work? Because, as compassionate people, we have been evaluating our charity by the rewards we receive through service, rather than the benefits received by the served. We have failed to adequately calculate the effects of our service on the lives of those reduced to objects of our pity and patronage.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse It* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2012), 167.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

Even when the desire to help is genuinely pure in heart, there can be somewhat of a false relationship between the giver and the receiver. Lupton explains:

Relationships built on need are seldom healthy. There is an implicit expectation (at least a hope) that the recipient of charity will use that assistance to better himself. The immediate predicament may pluck at one's heartstrings, but if it persists, the tune in time goes sour. No one wants to support irresponsibility. Or create dependency. Or feel used. Unless the victim of misfortune exerts honest effort to regain self-reliance, the relationship between helper and helpee will tend to deteriorate. At some point, accountability is required. The lack of full disclosure opens the door to suspicion and mistrust. Communication becomes strained. The recipient feels controlled by the strings attached by the giver, and the giver feels deceived by the recipient's lack of candor. The relationship eventually dissolves. Relationships built on need tend to be short-lived.¹⁹⁰

He further states: "Service seeks a need, a problem to fix, an object to pity. But pity diminishes, and respect emerges when servers find surprising strengths among the served, strengths not initially apparent when the served are seen as the nameless, needy poor."¹⁹¹

The challenge for providers is discovering a new way of seeing the clients, not for who they are when they come into a program, but what they can become and the innate ability to become the best they can be. A genuine desire to see the client's potential may be the key to bridging the gap between the client and the helper, which may be the key to unlocking a deeper and more helpful relationship for both of them. Because Christians believe every individual is an image bearer of God and has been made with a purpose, the church is in the perfect position to see the value of the client as well as empower them to reach their potential. The issue is that there are barriers that keep the Christians from proactively and productively helping the individual experiencing poverty. Noel Castellanos, CEO and president of the Christian Community Development Association, argues that, "Two massive barriers keep the US church

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

from doing ministry among the poor: (1) our wealth and privilege, which isolates us from the poor, and (2) our inability to persevere when ministry results don't come quickly."¹⁹² There cannot be an expectation that helping the poor is something that Christians block out for part of the year or that they compartmentalize in their lives. Care for the poor is to be a lifelong calling for the Christian.

In their book *When Helping Hurts*, Steve Corbett, the Community Development Specialist for the Chalmers Center for Economic Development and Brian Fikkert, the Founder and President of the Chalmers Center at Covenant College, make a connection between serving the poor and empowering the poor. The authors encourage their readers to see the dignity in the clients they serve, and that the Gospel is a central piece of the work. The authors focus not just on the outward change of those in need but the importance of inside transformation in order to find sustainable change.¹⁹³ Christ being brought to the poor is an integral part of helping bring sustainable change to those in need.

Another leader in the field of Christian social programs is Brandon Hatmaker, the author of *Barefoot Church: Serving the Least in a Consumer Culture*. He provides his readers with practical ideas to help them understand how helping the poor has just as much to do with the Gospel and personal transformation as it does with actually serving them. Hatmaker stresses authentic community and spiritual transformation for those who are helping the persons in need within one's community.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Noel Castellanos, John M. Perkins, and Wayne Gordon, *Where the Cross Meets the Street: What Happens to the Neighborhood When God Is at the Center* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 71.

¹⁹³ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor--And Yourself* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 120.

¹⁹⁴ Brandon Hatmaker, *Barefoot Church: Serving the Least in a Consumer Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 33-34.

The Need for the Church and Christian Leadership to Meet the Need of the Poor

The purpose of Christian leadership is to bring glory to God and to be a part of advancing the kingdom of God on the earth. Biblical leadership is not broken into different professions, but all leadership opportunities in all fields are meant to bring glory to God. The Apostle Paul told the church in Corinth: “So whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”¹⁹⁵ Agosto, a professor of New Testament studies, stated that,

Just as the disciples evoked Jesus’ direct response on the nature of leadership with their attempt to adopt the understanding that were prevalent in their culture, Paul faces a similar challenge in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Like Jesus before him, Paul associates leadership with the acceptance of servanthood and suffering. Against those who adopted secular understandings of leadership, he defined himself and his coworkers as *diakonoi* who give themselves for their communities. When he commends the leaders of the church to the congregation, he emphasizes their hard work and service.¹⁹⁶

In the Russian novelist and journalist Fyodor Dostoevsky’s letter to N.D. Fonvizina, a friend who gave him a copy of the New Testament, Dostoevsky wrote: “Moreover, if someone were to prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, then I would prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth.”¹⁹⁷ When it comes to leadership theories, even if someone were to prove that biblical leadership is not societies’ preferred leadership theory, it can still be argued that biblical leadership is the soundest leadership theory. Leading others through service, empowering others to be great, and being part of something that is greater than oneself is life’s greatest purpose. The early church practiced these principles and through God’s work of the Christian leader, the Christian church has grown exponentially. What remains consistent for believers is that the Bible

¹⁹⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:31.

¹⁹⁶ Efrain Agosto, *Servant Leadership: Jesus and Paul* (Nashville, TN: Chalice Press, 2005) 144–45.

¹⁹⁷ Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 152.

is viewed as the sacred Word of God and the leadership principles that existed during Christ's life and during the days of the early church are still applicable to leaders today.

Biblical leadership requires servanthood with no exception. The motive is never tied to the individual's glory, but to the glory of God. The motive of a Christian leader is not just reserved for those in full-time ministry, no matter what field the leader is in; the leader should strive to use his skills to bring glory to God. A leader in business should use this platform to elevate and serve others and his success should shine a light on Christ. If the leader is a leader within the medical field, he should use his talents and platform to bring glory to God. While having educated servants in the field of human services and social work is important, when it comes to community programs, there is value in having workers who have knowledge in a multitude of areas, and who can help the communities in need.

Serving, evangelizing, and caring for individuals experiencing poverty

Servant leadership in one's community can help bring the message of Christ to that community.

It can also help alleviate the issues facing individuals experiencing poverty, and who are the ones Jesus called us to reach. Serving city leaders, while not compromising the Christian leader's integrity, can help get the Christian leader to the table where decisions for the city are made.

Today, more than ever, Christian leaders with a servant's heart for serving individuals experiencing poverty are needed as leaders within their cities.

A Christian has the responsibility to provide leadership and influence in his community. Jesus commissioned believers to go into all of the world to make disciples.¹⁹⁸ The church is a lighthouse and a city on a hill that should shine and direct people towards Christ. At one time,

¹⁹⁸ Mark 16:15.

the local church was the first call when it came to social issues. Today, the government has taken over that role. There have been bills and legislations that are trying to minimize the work of Christian non-profits organizations and churches; yet there are findings that will be discussed later that show that Christian foster homes are especially beneficial for children in need. The local church should take this responsibility with the highest degree of passion; local business leaders have to take on this fight as well. It is overwhelming to look at all the problems that face our world, but by looking at the issues on a civic level it will empower one to have the tools to change their city, as well as have the tools to help improve larger scale problems.

In a study conducted by several researchers in a journal article called “The Role of Civic Leadership in Fostering Economic Resilience in City Regions,” the researchers found, “A key challenge identified though was described as one of the engaging leaders from businesses and the community, by suitably incentivizing people to participate and maintain involvement.”¹⁹⁹ In the study one of the issues presented was that it was hard to convince businesses and individuals of what the benefits are to civic leadership. The Mayor of Lakeland, Florida, who is a Christian, was recently in a meeting addressing the homeless initiatives. One of the leaders in the room stated that there is a clear advantage for businesses and individuals to help individuals experiencing poverty, because by helping these individuals become self-sufficient, our economy would see a boost, as well as our tax dollars could be allocated elsewhere. In a joking but serious manner, the mayor chimed back, “The benefit should be that they are helping another human being, is that not enough?”²⁰⁰ Sometimes, people do not want to help individuals experiencing

¹⁹⁹ Chay Brooks, Tim Vorley, and Nick Williams, “The Role of Civic Leadership in Fostering Economic Resilience in City Regions,” *Policy Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 2016): 1–16.

²⁰⁰ Meeting with Mayor Bill Mutz of Lakeland, Florida regarding the city’s proposal for a new homeless initiative.

poverty because of preconceived notions of these individuals, but it is the Christian leader's responsibility to be their advocate and to dismantle negative perceptions.

An important aspect of serving a community is to hear from the community in need. There are two ways people try to address needs in the community. One way is by implementing their expertise and telling the people what they know will benefit them. The other way is by hearing from the community, and then trying to address those needs with the help of their expertise. Finding out the needs of the community before offering help is best practice. Curphy, Krile, and Lund, leaders at Blandin Foundation, a private foundation designed to develop leaders to strengthen underserved communities, note that, "When you go to a doctor, you don't expect her to start with surgery. You want a diagnosis first. Likewise, when your car develops a strange noise, and you take it to a mechanic, you want him to just listen to the engine first and maybe ask a few questions. If he just opened the hood and started taking the engine apart, you'd be more than just a little upset. The method of skipping the diagnosis often happens in community groups. People want to take action before making a diagnosis: Let's just do something, and if it doesn't work, we'll try something else."²⁰¹

Collectively, as Christians, there needs to be a level of self-leadership. No one can push someone harder to make a change than one can push himself. Manz, a researcher and recipient of a Marvin Bower Fellowship at the Harvard Business School, states: "The goals we select and the strategies we apply to keep on task and sustain our motivation, the level of effort we choose to exert, the values we adopt to establish meaning and purpose for our activities, and so on—is

²⁰¹ Gordon Curphy, James F. Krile, and Duane R. Lund, *The Community Leadership Handbook: Framing Ideas, Building Relationships, and Mobilizing Resources* (Philadelphia, PA: Fieldstone Alliance, 2013), 1028.

fundamentally important.”²⁰² For people to see less government control and more freedom to make their community what they desire it to be, will require civic leadership. The change will not happen overnight, but leaders who are connected with each other and the needs of the community, community transformation will occur.

Successful church planters who seek to open up new campuses have an easier time growing their satellite sites in suburban areas. But what it will take to effectively change communities is to plant in the areas where poverty exists. Tim Rice, a local pastor in Lakeland, Florida, recently told the story of the second campus he planted. He was trying to evangelize a poor neighborhood that was only a few miles away from his church. He would ask them to come to his church, but he was rarely seeing any fruit from the work. He went back to those houses and asked why they were not coming. Many of them told him that it was too far of a walk and when they did walk, they had to walk through the parking lot where there were Mercedes, nice minivans, and huge trucks. They said that they immediately felt like they did not belong. The pastor then decided to plant a church in the neighborhood despite his church being so close.

Today, that neighborhood has been transformed. According to that pastor, the city of Lakeland reported that crime has decreased, abortions have diminished, and child abuse has declined in that area. The pastor was missional about bringing life into that neighborhood. Not through picket signs and a pointing finger, but by sending intentional Christians and planting a church into the neighborhood. The pastor said it was not easy, but it was well worth it.

Advocating for the individuals in poverty is not an easy mission. The mission to care for those individuals will cause Christians to step out of their comfort zones and sacrifice for the lives of others. Leonard Sweet points out that, “. . . whereas the world tries to eliminate or ignore

²⁰² Charles C. Manz, “Taking the Self-Leadership High Road: Smooth Surface or Potholes Ahead?,” *Academy of Management Perspectives* 29, no. 1 (December 10, 2014): 132–51. Accessed November 25, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2013.0060>.

suffering through abortion, euthanasia, Christians confront it, not to condone or celebrate it, but to find ways for suffering to be consecrated, reconceived and repurposed in the light of God's mission in the world. Christians will also be attacked for staying with the afflicted until the end, always looking for ways for suffering to be made redemptive through faith and prayer.”²⁰³

The church has been commissioned to reach communities in need. The Gospel of Matthew record's Christ commission to believers. “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”²⁰⁴ This presents a humbling opportunity for the God of the universe to choose, redeemed people, or the local church to help him carry out His mission! Christianity can make communities a touch more like Heaven by providing a more God-centered approach towards life. There is a chance that once people are able to connect with Christ-centered community, they will be able to better accept the opportunity of moving into the community of faith.

The evangelist Billy Graham wrote: “One of the greatest priorities of the church today is to mobilize the laity to do the work of evangelism.”²⁰⁵ Social Justice and evangelism are distinct yet equal. Ronald J. Sider, an American theologian and social activist argues that, “Evangelism involves the announcement (through words and deeds) of the Good News of justification, regeneration, the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the fact of the new community where all

²⁰³ Leonard Sweet, *A World on Fire* (n.p: Private Copy, 2019), 124.

²⁰⁴ Matthew 28: 18-20.

²⁰⁵ “Billy Graham in Quotes,” *Thomas Nelson* (blog), 13. Accessed September 3, 2020. <https://www.thomasnelson.com/9780849948336/billy-graham-in-quotes/>.

relationships are being redeemed. When individuals accept this Good News, they enter into a personal relationship with the living God through faith in Jesus Christ and experience salvation.”²⁰⁶

Maslow’s hierarchy of need was developed in 1942 by psychologist Abraham Maslow and is used in psychology as a tool to work through program development and research. Researcher Kenneth Brown explains that “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, or “pyramid form”, works up from the most fundamental of human needs. For example, only when the most basic needs, identified as human physiological needs, have been met can safety/security needs be met, and only when safety/security needs have been met, can belongingness needs be considered, and so on, all the way through the other identified needs of: esteem needs, cognitive needs, aesthetics needs, to self-actualizing needs.”²⁰⁷ Following Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs through, it seen that the physiological needs, like hunger and thirst, need to be met before the other human needs can be met. From a Christian perspective, it is important to note that when the basic needs of others are met, a door opens for them to start considering self-actualizing needs. Meeting the hunger needs of individuals experiencing poverty opens the opportunity for the church to also evangelize.

Feeding programs have been created throughout our nation to help the individuals experiencing poverty and hunger. One can argue that what makes the Christian feeding programs different from all of these programs is what Christian feeding programs provide alongside their

²⁰⁶ Ronald J. Sider and John R.W. Stott, *Evangelism, Salvation and Social Justice* (Cambridge, England: Grove Books Ltd., 1979), 264.

²⁰⁷ Kenneth Brown, “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Used to Measure Motivation for Religious Behaviour,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 9, no. 1 (2006): 99.

feeding distribution: it is the Good News. While food will satisfy the hunger of the body, the life transformation of salvation will satisfy the soul.

Alongside with sharing the Gospel, pastoral care can play a vital role in the lives of these people. Pastors have the opportunity to bring the comfort of God to the trauma that those in need face. Many of those who live in poverty-stricken areas also come with the pain of trauma. The Apostle Paul provides excellent insight into how God interacts with our trauma. He writes: "...the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."²⁰⁸ Through the pastor's practice and example, he or she can show the church how to lead with God's love and the comfort He provides in the face of these children's trauma. "By reclaiming the essential practices of our faith – compassionate witnessing, communal lament, and public worship – we enable people to continue to love God in the face of evil and suffering and in so doing to prevent tragic suffering from becoming evil."²⁰⁹

While there is no step-by-step plan found in Scriptures to instruct a pastor on how to counsel a traumatized individual, God desires to provide healing to the broken through pastoral care. When taking on this task, the pastor must be sensitive in how to counsel those who have experienced trauma. Author and former Moody Bible Institute professor Paul Maxwell, in his research of theologically understanding of abuse, points out: "Trauma is as physiological as a broken leg and as spiritual as a broken heart, and God's relationship to each is very different."²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ 2 Cor 1:3-4 (ESV).

²⁰⁹ Deborah van Deusen, *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 21.

²¹⁰ Paul C. Maxwell, "Betrayal Trauma and Covenant: Theologically Understanding Abuse Trauma and Traumatically Reforming Theological Understanding," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 19, no. 1 (December 2017): 241-247. Accessed April 1, 2019. <https://seu.on.worldcat.org/oclc/7175977269>.

Bringing healing to trauma may look different than other issues brought before pastors. Traumatized children or adults have a harder time trusting or believing in God due to past belief; therefore, the counseling will require patience. Maxwell state that,

The objective reality of Christ and his work cannot make each person's process of healing from trauma and repentance from sin move faster or slower than it does. The leg heals at a certain rate, and the heart grieves for a certain season – likewise, applying “victory” metaphors to victims may feel more to them like theological malpractice than spiritual healing –like prescribing ibuprofen for cancer treatment. This will either be a beautiful testament to God's faithfulness, or further evidence of his betrayal.²¹¹

Meeting the tangible needs of the needy provides access to share the Gospel and bring healing to pain. Religious engagement can play a major role in providing safe spaces for individuals to heal and develop resilience. Many times, families desire support as they try to find meaning from the trauma that has happened to them.²¹² The church can help families find purpose in the midst of their pain.

Summary

The research presented through Scripture, theology, and literature reviews has crafted a foundation for this project for the necessity to meet the felt and spiritual needs of individuals experiencing poverty. Christians have been commissioned to care for the poor and the oppressed. The Old and New Testament have provided examples of individuals and collective groups that stood up for the cause of the impoverished. There was debt relief and prophetic utterances that benefited those who were in need. During His time on earth, Jesus also provided an example and a mandate to care for the poor. The Early Church took this mandate seriously and gave what they

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

²¹² Linda L. Barnes, Gregory A. Plotnikoff, Kenneth Fox, and Sara Pendleton, “Subject Reviews: Spirituality and Foster Care,” *Journal of Pediatrics* 106, no. 4 (2000): 903. Accessed April 1, 2019. <https://seu.on.worldcat.org/oclc/96240263>.

had to those in need. It is the responsibilities of today's Christians to carry on the good work of caring for the most vulnerable in our society.

Current literature provides support for caring for individuals experiencing poverty. There are theological debates regarding the emergence of what some call the social gospel and the methods in which the poor are cared for, but there is agreement that there is work to be done. The statistics show a grim picture of the trauma and poor living conditions that many Americans live in, and the church is in a prime position to be an answer to the need.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians are provided with wisdom and strength that require each individual to put down selfish ambitions and look out for the least of these. There is a purpose that weaves through the Body of Christ which is to meet both the tangible needs and the spiritual needs of the poor. What is done for the least of these is viewed by Christ as done unto Him and neglecting the least is to have neglected Christ.

The churches can be a changing force in their communities and can become a valued asset through the lens of the government. Michael Howell-Moroney a scholar in the fields of public administration and urban affairs points out that, "As intergovernmental human service delivery systems continue to expand their reliance on secular and faith-based non-governmental actors, faith-based institutions will also continue to grow in importance as key components of study for public administration."²¹³ As different government administrations add and take away funding for social services, the church can be the constant in their communities. Through this, eternal change can be made in the lives of these families. Michael Howell-Moroney adds: "This impact will not only assist the many physical and emotional needs, but also the spiritual

²¹³ Michael Howell-Moroney, "Faith-Based Partnership and Foster Parents Satisfaction," *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration* 36, no. 2 (2013): 247.

condition of each child, since salvation may not be the goal of the states served but it is the goal of the church.”²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Howell-Moroney M., “Fostering Capacity: The Role of Faith-Based Congregations in the Child Welfare System in the United States,” *International Journal of Public Administration* 32, no. 1 (2009): 33. Accessed November 15, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900690802393584>.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROJECT NARRATIVE AND FIELD WORK

Introduction

Throughout the Old Testament, there were commands and instructions regarding proper care for the poor. Jesus and the Early Church modeled how to care for the poor and it is the privilege and duty of today's Christians to continue that work. It is the opinion of this writer that such a ministry requires mobilized and equipped Christians who are willing to do the work to which God calls them.

The purpose of the previous chapter was to discover Old Testament and New Testament principles for caring for the poor. The present chapter will focus on how churches and non-profits with feeding programs are running their feeding programs. This will help provide systems to ensure that the poor or disenfranchised are being properly ministered to by the local church.

In this chapter, the project will be presented, goals and objectives will be communicated, and the structure and methodological approach used to complete the project will be explained. Further, help will be provided so the reader can understand the purpose of the project, the goals, and objectives the writer seeks to achieve, information about the churches and non-profits surveyed, and the tools that were used to gather and analyze the data.

Goals and Objectives

The question the writer desires to answer is: "What elements are important to provide a holistic feeding program that meets the need of an individual physically and spiritually?" The first goal is to identify what practices churches and non-profits are using in their feeding programs. Common

factors will be gathered through questions that identify what type of feeding programs they are offering, what life skills programs are being offered, and how the organization is sharing the Gospel.

The second goal is to identify systems for non-profits organizations and churches to ensure they are providing opportunities for their clients to enhance their life skills and hear the Gospel. Although not every client will have the desire to hear the Gospel or enhance his/her life skills, providing resources to churches and non-profits will help them be better equipped to do both. The desire is to see a holistic approach to providing care for the individuals experiencing poverty.

The objective is to offer systems and programs learned from the surveyed participants and resources that are already created at One More Child. These tools will reduce the time and resources needed to create these programs and will provide churches and non-profits with resources that have been carefully crafted. These tools could help leaders of food distribution programs see lasting changes in the lives of their clients, through providing curriculums and programs that enhance life skills and methods to present the Gospel. These resources will help clients improve their quality of life.

The final goal is to compare how well churches and non-profits are doing compared to Scriptural mandates, theology, and contemporary literature. As reminded in chapter two, Christians are commissioned and empowered to care for the physical and spiritual needs of individuals experiencing poverty. Using the churches' responses, the reader will be able to compare the holistic approach to caring for individuals experiencing poverty.

The objective is to gather the information gleaned from chapter two about caring for individuals experiencing poverty and the information gathered from the interviews and surveys

to see what overlaps. It is the opinion of the writer that the feeding programs have a desire for a wholistic approach and could use resources to make the physical and spiritual components of their programs stronger. Through the information gathered, a framework for a Gospel centered program that provides holistic care will be created.

This research project was birthed out of a desire to enhance feeding programs through adding additional life skills programs and Gospel integration. It is the writer's opinion that if organizations with feeding programs be provided with resources that will help advance their mission and provide holistic approaches for their clients, the improvement in the quality of life for their clients could increase. These efforts should increase the spread of the Gospel and help individuals get to a self-sufficient state.

Research Methodology

The research will be qualitative in measure with a goal of analyzing what these feeding programs do best and what common areas of improvement are present. These programs were chosen because of their known presence in their communities and the impact they are having in the lives of their clients. It is important to note that just because a program is meeting the tangible needs of the clients, it does not mean that the clients are seeing life change from building better financial, career, and parenting skills. As seen in chapter two of this dissertation, the goal of caring for individuals experiencing poverty is not just to meet their physical needs, but to also provide them with the life changing salvation that the Gospel provides.

Research Design

This research was conducted using a mixed method approach incorporating three research methods. The first was independent research of the churches and organizations through gathering information about the non-profits through their websites and social media. The second method was talking to the leader of the non-profits via telephone to gather information about the non-profit. Four pertinent questions were asked during the telephone interview:

1. When was the program started?
2. What was the motivation behind starting the program?
3. Has the program grown and what have been the factors behind the growth?
4. How many volunteers and staff are involved?

Finally, the leaders of the program were sent a survey through an online platform called SurveyMonkey. The survey did not collect any personal identifiers. An informed consent was provided on the first page of the survey. On the first page, those who were surveyed were able to choose to continue the survey or opt out of the survey after reading the informed consent. Both the questions and the informed consent were approved by the Institutional Review Board of Southeastern University. The questions on the survey were as follows.

1. What type of feeding program does your organization or church offer or utilize?
2. What influenced your church or organization to start a feeding program?
3. What life skills services do you provide (sewing, cooking, reading, education, job readiness, budgeting) if any?
4. How do you judge the success of the program?
5. How is the Gospel presented to the clients that you serve?
6. Is there evangelism training for your staff/volunteers?

7. Does your program track Gospel presentations or salvations? If so, how do you measure and track the presentations and salvations?
8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the method of Gospel presentation you incorporate?
9. How is the presentation of the Gospel received?
10. Would Gospel-centered curriculums and programs that focus on life skills and client empowerment benefit your program?

Research Participants

Ten Christian feeding programs from Central Florida were studied in this project. Each of the non-profits had a feeding program that served a specific population within their community. These populations included individuals experiencing poverty and individuals experiencing homelessness. The history of each of these programs will be provided. The connections of this writer with these feeding programs that will be evaluated is through my work at One More Child. All ten churches or organizations receive food donations for their feeding programs from One More Child. The ten churches and organizations that were chosen were The Dream Center, Combee Connection, Lighthouse Ministries, Kathleen Baptist Church, The Freedom Tour, Faith Xtreme, Missionary Baptist Church, Mt. Tabor Baptist Church, Parker Street Ministry, and One More Child.

The programs were chosen pursuing a non-random, purposive sampling strategy due to their focus on the biblical command to feed the poor. A brief history and impact of the feeding programs will be presented in this section. The programs' life-skills services and Gospel presentation or the lack thereof will also be presented.

The Dream Center is a non-profit organization in Lakeland, Florida that was started out of the vision of Victory Church, which is part of the Assemblies of God. The desire of the church was for the organization to be every church's "dream center", therefore, Victory did not want to attach their name to the non-profit and the Dream Center was created as a stand-alone organization.²¹⁵ The website states, "The Dream Center was opened in 2003 and has always aimed to serve the community by meeting real needs and offering resources for positive change. Through community service, mentoring programs, community classes and more, the Dream Center hopes to offer Christ's genuine love to those we encounter."²¹⁶

Three years ago, the organization started their feeding program. They observed that their community had a high degree of food insecurity, through conversations with people within the community and through needs presented in their program. At its inception the Dream Center never had any thoughts of distributing food, but they felt that God was prompting them to provide this service. They have seen growth over the last three years and are now providing 140 bags of food for families twice a month and are serving between 350 and 400 individuals. They have one staff member responsible for the program and they utilize over 20 volunteers.²¹⁷

Combee Connection is a non-profit based in Lakeland, Florida. Their social media account states: "Our mission today is to provide the Gospel, food, clothing, other life sustaining items, love and a sense of community and belonging to those in need in the Lakeland area."²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Leader of Dream Center's feeding program, interviewed by author over the phone, Lakeland, March 23, 2022.

²¹⁶ "Our Story," The Dream Center of Lakeland, accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.dreamcenterlakeland.org/about>.

²¹⁷ Leader of Dream Center's feeding program, interviewed by author over the phone, Lakeland, March 23, 2022.

²¹⁸ Combee Connection, "About us," Facebook, accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/combee-connection-311568326158191>.

The program was started in 2017 due to problems that arose from Hurricane Irma. After the hurricane passed, some people in their community needed shelter and those who still had homes were without power. The organization set out to provide food and resources to these families. One way the organization provided food for children was by transporting the children to church each Sunday, where they would receive a meal before service would start. More awareness of needs within the community became apparent when the leaders and volunteers would drop the children back to their homes after service. When staff and volunteers were invited into homes, they observed that many of the homes they visited had no food in the refrigerator and limited food in their pantries.

The need rose even more during the COVID-19 pandemic. Going into this pandemic, Combee Connection was providing food for 30 families. During the height of the pandemic, they were providing food for 4,000 households per month and took more than 500 individuals to church. The program is operated with 2 full time staff, three consistent volunteers, and volunteer groups that come to serve.²¹⁹

Lighthouse ministries purchased a former liquor store in 1977 and opened their first location. Their website states their mission as: “Lighthouse Ministries is set apart by the Spirit of God to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to meet the physical, emotional, and other needs of the poor and at-risk population.”²²⁰ Their feeding program was one of the first things they began to do as an organization. The motivation behind the feeding program was the hunger that was present within the homeless population. The program has grown into recovery programs

²¹⁹ Leader of Combee Connection’s feeding program, interviewed by author over the phone, Lakeland, March 23, 2022.

²²⁰ “Who We Are,” Lighthouse Ministries, accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.lighthousemin.org/who-we-are>.

with overnight housing, children's programs, and education centers. Each of these programs ensures that the participants are being fed. The program has five fulltime staff, several interns, and 35-45 volunteers.²²¹

Freedom Tour was started in 2015 and has locations in Winter Haven, Florida and Lake Wales, Florida. The motivation behind starting the program was to reach people for the Gospel. The ministry provides mobile relief which helps families who have lost their homes from natural disasters and through their food bank which holds over 40,000 pallets of non-perishable foods, drinks, and supplies. The program has grown substantially since it started and the leader believes this is because they followed God's command to feed the hungry. The program is run by four staff members and 40 volunteers.²²²

Faith Xtreme started in Winter Haven, Florida in 2015. The feeding program was not part of the initial design of the organization. The program was created after they noticed that the children coming to their program did not have food for the weekend. Therefore, the organization started feeding the children and families during the days and nights they were offering their program called Clubs, which provides a safe environment for children to play games, hear Bible lessons, and interact with positive role models. The website states that the mission of the organization is: "Faith Xtreme reaches kids through evangelism, disciples them in God's Word, and provides opportunities for them to serve Jesus by serving others. Our Facility, The Refuge, provides a safe place for these kids in the midst of an at-risk community; our pantry provides free food and clothing to meet the physical needs of families."²²³ The program continues to grow

²²¹ Leader of Lighthouse Ministries feeding program, interviewed by author over the phone, Lakeland, March 23, 2022.

²²² Leader of Freedom Tour's feeding program, interviewed by author over the phone, Lakeland, March 23, 2022.

²²³ "About," Faith Xtreme, accessed March 24, 2022. <https://www.faihtxtreme.org/about>.

because of increasing referrals coming from Title One Schools. The organization is currently serving 1,200 children. The feeding program operates with two full time staff. The children in their program are also the volunteers who help distribute food to families in the area.²²⁴

Parker Street Ministries is a non-profit in Lakeland, Florida. The website states that, “Parker Street ministries originated in 1996 as a ministry of one church seeking to bring change in one impoverished and crime-ridden neighborhood. It was called the Parker Street Project. Over the years, more churches, community members, and businesses began participating.”²²⁵ The program aims to meet the need for academic enrichment for the children in their neighbourhood. During the programs for the children, the organization provides food. During the summer the organization feeds the children two meals and a snack. The feeding program started with 20-30 children and now has grown to over 120 children. The program is operated by two staff members and 13 volunteers.

One More Child is an organization that is headquartered in Lakeland, Florida. The website states the mission as: “Our mission is to provide Christ-centered services to vulnerable children and struggling families.”²²⁶ One More Child was created in Arcadia, Florida in 1904. The organization started as an orphanage and has grown into a ministry that provides services for foster children, trafficking survivors, single moms, and struggling families.

One of the feeding programs One More Child operates, is called their Family Support Program. The Family Support Program was created in 2016. Meeting the needs of working families experiencing poverty in the community was the motivation behind starting their

²²⁴ Leader of Faith Xtreme’s feeding program, interviewed by author over the phone, Lakeland, March 23, 2022.

²²⁵ “FAQ,” Parker Street Ministry, accessed March 24, 2022. <https://www.psmlakeland.org/faq/>.

²²⁶ “Our Mission,” One More Child, accessed March 24, 2022. <https://onemorechild.org/about-us/our-mission/>.

ministry. Since 2016 the program has expanded to help at risk families and families who are receiving their children back from the Department of Children and Families after a removal. The organization provides food for families as they go through job skills classes, financial literacy classes, and parenting classes. As families complete their services, they get credits to use in the food pantry. The clients select their own food, clothing, household items, and hygiene products. The program also provides emergency food boxes to families in need. The program is operated by five staff members, two interns, 15-20 individual volunteers and numerous groups that come to serve.²²⁷

Christ Memorial Baptist Church started their feeding program in 2015, in Lakeland, Florida. There was a lot of food insecurity in the neighbourhood surrounding the church. The church started identifying families in the neighbourhood that needed food. Through word of mouth and increased donations, the program has grown to serve 180-240 families each weekend. The ministry does not have any paid staff and is completely volunteer run. They average between 8-14 volunteers on a given food distribution. Some of the volunteers are individuals who have been served by the program.²²⁸

Mt. Tabor Baptist Church is a church located in Lakeland, Florida and has been providing food for families since 2014. The church started the program after working with a local food bank. They realized that by providing people with food they could then invite them to church.

²²⁷ Leader of One More Child's feeding program, interviewed by author over the phone, Lakeland, March 23, 2022.

²²⁸ Leader of Christ Memorial Baptist Church's feeding program, interviewed by author over the phone, Lakeland, March 23, 2022.

The program started small and was feeding 20-30 families a month and is now feeding 250-275 every week. The program is led by two staff members and 15-20 volunteers each week.²²⁹

Summary

In this chapter, the Goals and Objectives, the research methodology, the research design, and information about the research participants were provided. In the following chapter, an analysis of the non-profits services that are being provided will be evaluated and analyzed, and a synthesis within the ministry context will be completed. This information will help the research to offer resources to non-profits and churches to create a holistic approach for caring for individuals experiencing poverty within their ministries.

²²⁹ Leader of Mt. Tabor Baptist Church's feeding program, interviewed by author over the phone, Lakeland, March 23, 2022.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROJECT EVALUATED

Introduction

The question the research sought to answer is: "What elements are important to provide a holistic feeding program that meets the physical and spiritual needs of an individual?" This mixed methods study focused on how churches and Christian non-profit organizations in the central region of Florida meet the needs of their clients. This study is a cumulative review of ten churches and Christian non-profits organizations through a survey given to their leaders.

Once the interviews and surveys were completed a content analysis approach was utilized wherein the information was gathered, and the research looked for trends and insights. The areas explored in this chapter are types of feeding programs, motivations for starting a feeding program, life skills offered, success indicators, evangelism training, gospel presentation, tracking salvations, and needs. Finally, the research will provide a synthesis within the ministry context.

Survey Results

This section reveals the study's findings by investigating the similarities, differences, and needs of the church and Christian non-profit organizations' feeding programs. The leaders explained their motivations behind starting their feeding program, what programs they offer, how they share the gospel, and if there is a need for a curriculum or program to implement in order to help enhance their work.

Types of feeding programs

Question 1: What type of feeding program(s) does your organization or church offer or utilize?

Church or Organization	Food Pantry	Drive- Through Distribution	Food Delivery	Hot Meals	Other
Dream Center	X				
Combee Connection	X		X		
Lighthouse Ministries	X			X	
Kathleen Baptist Church		X			
The Freedom Tour	X				
Faith Xtreme	X			X	
Missionary Baptist Church	X	X			
Mt. Tabor Baptist Church	X				
Parker Street Ministry	X				X
One More Child	X				

Table 4.1: Volunteer Responses to question 1.

Question 1 asked the participants, "What type of feeding program does your organization or church offer or utilize?" This question helped the research better categorize the program structures of the different Christian non-profit organizations and churches surveyed. Several program types were identified through this question. The programs offered through these organizations are as follows: food pantries, drive-through distributions, food delivery, and hot meals.

- The most common feeding program found throughout the surveys was the food pantry model. These churches and non-profits distribute non-perishables, fruits, vegetables, and meats to individuals dealing with food insecurity. All of the pantries except for The Freedom Tour has an option that allows clients to choose the foods they want from what is available.
- Kathleen Baptist Church and Missionary Baptist Church have drive-through food distribution program. These two churches bring food to a specific location and then distribute the food into clients' vehicles as they drive through a line. The clients do not choose their own food in this program.

- Parker Street Ministries provides two snacks and lunch for children during their summer program, and those same students receive healthy snacks during the school year in the after-school program.
- Finally, Lighthouse Ministries and Faith Xtreme provide hot meals for their clients.
- Combee Connection is the only organization that provides a home delivery method, taking the food to the homes of those dealing with food insecurity.

Influences for starting a feeding program

Question 2: What influenced your church or organization to start a feeding program?

Church or Organization	Combat Food Insecurity	Christian Outreach
Dream Center	X	
Combee Connection	X	
Lighthouse Ministries		X
Kathleen Baptist Church	X	
The Freedom Tour	X	X
Faith Xtreme		X
Missionary Baptist Church	X	
Mt. Tabor Baptist Church		X
Parker Street Ministry	X	
One More Child	X	

Table 4.2: Volunteer Responses to question 2.

Question two asked the leaders: "What influenced your church or organization to start a feeding program?" This question helped the research define what factors helped motivate organizations to start their feeding program. Through a better understanding of motivation factors, the research provides better understanding of the mission of the organizations surveyed and better identify potential motivators for others.

- A common motivating factor for starting a feeding program that the organizations identified, is the problem of food insecurity. This was discovered from their

relationships with the community and conversations with individuals attending their other programs. For The Dream Center, many of these conversations occurred during the pandemic.

- Regarding Lighthouse Ministries, The Freedom Tour, Faith Xtreme, and Mt. Tabor Baptist Church, Christian outreach was a primary motivation. Providing food and tangible resources for people with needs in their community was a bridge to connect with them and share the Gospel or invite them to their church.
- For One More Child, the desire was to help families stabilize to attain self-sufficiency by meeting the needs of families struggling with food insecurity. The organization's desire is to keep children out of the welfare system by ensuring that families have the tools to thrive in their careers, their finances, and as a family unit.
- Parker Street Ministries focuses solely on their particular neighbourhood and stated that they are looking to make a holistic difference with their clients. After asking the neighbourhood residents what their greatest need was, they responded that they a safe space for students when school let out that also provided academic support. During the inception of their program, they believed that feeding the students was an essential part of the program.

Life skills offered

Question 3: What life skills services do you provide (sewing, cooking, reading, education, job readiness, budgeting) if any?

Church or Organization	Job Skills	Financial Literacy	Education (academic)	Parenting	Health & Wellness	Bible Studies	None
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Dream Center	X	X			X	X	
Combee Connection	X	X			X		
Lighthouse Ministries	X	X	X			X	
Kathleen Baptist Church							X
The Freedom Tour							X
Faith Xtreme		X					
Missionary Baptist Church							X
Mt. Tabor Baptist Church							X
Parker Street Ministry	X				X		
One More Child	X	X		X			

Table 4.3: Volunteer Responses to question 3.

The third question asked, "What life skill services do you provide, if any?" This question was designed to see how many organizations are providing life skills and what the gaps may be for Christian non-profits organizations and churches. The answers to this question will help the research gather resources for churches and non-profits.

The findings of the research show that life skills programs were a strength throughout the surveyed Christian non-profit organizations. They provided budgeting assistance, services for the children, job readiness, age management, nutrition, health, parenting, financial literacy, and adult literacy. The programs were designed to increase the quality of life for the client through a holistic approach.

The Freedom Tour was the only Christian non-profit organization that does not offer life skills programs while none of the churches provided life skills for the clients they were serving. The writer assumes that the Christian non-profits organizations are more equipped to provide life skills courses due to the social workers who are leading the programs and could benefit from those who are leaders within the non-profit social work sector.

Evaluating success

Question 4: How do you judge the success of the program?

Church or Organization	Attendance of Clients	Positive Outcomes for Clients	Volunteerism	Physical Needs Met	Salvations	Relationships Created
Dream Center	X					
Combee Connection		X		X	X	
Lighthouse Ministries	X					
Kathleen Baptist Church	X		X	X		
The Freedom Tour		X				
Faith Xtreme				X		
Missionary Baptist Church				X		X
Mt. Tabor Baptist Church			X			
Parker Street Ministry	X	X				
One More Child		X				

Table 4.4: Volunteer Responses to question 4.

The fourth question asked, "How do you judge the success of the program?" This question helped the research define what churches and Christian non-profit organizations want to achieve through feeding programs. This question was designed to help the writer gather resources that would interest Christian non-profit organizations and churches.

There was a wide array of answers for how Christian non-profit organizations and churches evaluate the success of their programs. However, only two of the organizations had specific Key Performance Indicators. "Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are the critical (key) indicators of progress toward an intended result. KPIs provide a focus for strategic and operational improvement, create an analytical basis for decision making and help focus attention on what matters most."²³⁰ The writer believes that KPIs could be beneficial for churches and Christian non-profit organizations to help identify the effectiveness of the programs that are being offered.

²³⁰ "KPI," KPI.org, A Strategy Management Group, accessed March 29, 2022, <https://kpi.org/KPI-Basics>.

- Lighthouse Ministries assessed growth outcomes based on four pathways that their case managers evaluate. The pathways include spiritual growth, community, industry, and education. Education is their leading pathway which includes adult basic education, spiritual growth classes, faith, finances, and work life.
- One More Child judged success based on data collected through assessments that are completed once the client is accepted into the program, during their time in the program, and after completing the program, based on financial literacy, job skills, and parenting.
- Combee Connection evaluated success as lives impacted positively, salvation, resolving substance abuse issues and homelessness, and meeting physical needs.
- The Freedom Tour listed life change as an evaluation of success but did not explain the factors contributing to changed lives.
- Faith Xtreme, for its part, counted meeting immediate needs and helping families falling into future, desperate situations.
- Parker Street Ministries runs an after-school and summer program and evaluates attendance and academic improvement as their primary indicators for success.
- The churches predominately looked at three factors. The first was the number of attendees, the second was the physical needs being met, and the third was volunteer engagement.

The research showed that the Christian non-profits organizations and churches surveyed judge success in different ways. The Christian non-profits organizations appeared to have a more comprehensive array of indicators they were looking at to evaluate the program's success. On the

other hand, churches desired to meet physical needs and provide an opportunity for church members to get engaged within their community.

Evangelism

The research explored if evangelism training was done throughout the churches and Christian non-profit organizations. Through the writer's work experience with Christian volunteers, there has been a common theme that there are Christians who have never shared their faith and do not feel comfortable doing so because they are unsure how to do so. Four questions were created to help better understand how churches and Christian non-profit organizations think about evangelism. The questions asked how churches present the Gospel to clients, what evangelism training is offered for staff and volunteers, if these organizations tracked Gospel presentations and salvations, and what advantages and disadvantages they see in their methods.

Question 5: How is the Gospel presented to the clients that you serve?

Church or Organization	One on One Conversations and Prayer	Bible Studies	Invitations to Church
Dream Center	X	X	
Combee Connection	X		
Lighthouse Ministries	X	X	
Kathleen Baptist Church	X		X
The Freedom Tour	X		
Faith Xtreme	X		
Missionary Baptist Church	X		
Mt. Tabor Baptist Church			X
Parker Street Ministry	X	X	
One More Child	X	X	

Table 4.5: Volunteer Responses to question 5.

The majority of the churches and Christian non-profit organizations presented the Gospel through one-on-one conversations and prayer with the clients who come to the feeding program.

- The Dream Center, Lighthouse Ministries, Parker Street Ministries, and One More Child provide clients with an opportunity to attend a Bible study if they decide to attend.
- Kathleen Baptist Church and Mt. Tabor Baptist Church provide information about their church services when client come to pick up their food.

Question 6: Is there evangelism training for your staff/volunteers?

Church or Organization	Yes	No
Dream Center	X	
Combee Connection	X	
Lighthouse Ministries	X	
Kathleen Baptist Church	X	
The Freedom Tour	X	
Faith Xtreme	X	
Missionary Baptist Church	X	
Mt. Tabor Baptist Church		X
Parker Street Ministry	X	
One More Child		X

Table 4.6: Volunteer Responses to question 6.

Evangelism training varied across the ten feeding programs.

- Mt. Tabor Baptist Church and One More Child are the only feeding programs that do not offer evangelism training.
- Combee Connection strategically pairs up new volunteer staff with a leader who has been doing the work for some time, and those staff and volunteers learn through example.
- The Freedom Tour recorded that training is done through church services.
- Finally, Lighthouse Ministries and Parker Street Ministry appeared to have robust training program. Lighthouse Ministries trains all staff, residents, and volunteers through a program they call their Mission, Vision, Values, and Pathways

program, which provides a discipleship guide. Evangelism is a component of the discipleship guide. Parker Street Ministry trains at the beginning of summer, the beginning of the school year, through monthly training and weekly staff meetings.

Question 7: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the method of Gospel presentation you incorporate?

Church or Organization	Advantage: Access to People	Disadvantage: Clients are Transient	Disadvantage: Wide Range of Ages	Disadvantage: Time Restraints	Disadvantage: Difficult to track	Disadvantage: Limits Funding	Unsure	None
Dream Center		X						
Combee Connection								X
Lighthouse Ministries						X		
Kathleen Baptist Church	X			X				
The Freedom Tour	X							
Faith Xtreme								X
Missionary Baptist Church							X	
Mt. Tabor Baptist Church								X
Parker Street Ministry			X					
One More Child					X			

Table 4.7: Volunteer Responses to question 7.

The trend observed the advantages and disadvantages of the different organizations.

- Kathleen Baptist and The Freedom Tour both recorded that the feeding program allows them to reach many people who may not have exposure to the Gospel. However, there were a variety of disadvantages listed across the organizations.
- The Dream Center's challenge is that many of their clients are transient, which made follow-ups difficult.

- Parker Street Ministry provides services to children in kindergarten through 12th grade, which makes it difficult to communicate the Gospel with different age groups at the same time.
- Kathleen Baptist Church runs a drive through feeding program and is limited by time because they need to keep the car line moving, therefore it is difficult to have enough time for a meaningful conversation.
- One More Child recorded that because the Gospel is presented on a case-by-case basis, it makes it difficult to track the Gospel presentations.
- Finally, an issue that Lighthouse Ministries has is because they are presenting the Gospel they do not qualify for certain funding.

Question 8: Does your program track Gospel presentations or salvations? If so, how do you measure and track the presentations and salvations?

Church or Organization	Yes	No
Dream Center		X
Combee Connection		X
Lighthouse Ministries		X
Kathleen Baptist Church		X
The Freedom Tour		X
Faith Xtreme		X
Missionary Baptist Church		X
Mt. Tabor Baptist Church		X
Parker Street Ministry		X
One More Child		X

Table 4.8: Volunteer Responses to question 7.

None of the churches or Christian non-profit organizations track salvations. The research found this finding similar to his thoughts and does not suggest tracking salvations. Tracking salvations can be deceiving because clients may believe that if they do not accept salvation, they will not receive the provided resources, therefore making a false profession of faith. Therefore, the numbers may not be an accurate representation of those who truly accept Christ. While there

is not a metric associated with salvations, clients who are interested in furthering their faith have opportunities for further their faith.

Question 9: How is the presentation of the Gospel received?

Church or Organization	Well	With Resistant	N/A
Dream Center	X		
Combee Connection	X		
Lighthouse Ministries	X		
Kathleen Baptist Church	X		
The Freedom Tour	X		
Faith Xtreme	X		
Missionary Baptist Church	X		
Mt. Tabor Baptist Church			X
Parker Street Ministry	X		
One More Child	X		

Table 4.9: Volunteer Responses to question 9.

All of the organizations surveyed stated that the Gospel presentation is received well from clients. None of the organizations stated that there is any resistance to Gospel Presentation. Mt. Tabor Baptist Church did not answer the question.

Need for curriculums

Question 10: Would Gospel-centered curriculums and programs that focus on life skills and client empowerment benefit your program?

Church or Organization	Yes	No	Maybe	Currently Using	N/A
Dream Center				X	
Combee Connection				X	
Lighthouse Ministries	X			X	
Kathleen Baptist Church			X		
The Freedom Tour			X		
Faith Xtreme	X				
Missionary Baptist Church			X		

Mt. Tabor Baptist Church					X
Parker Street Ministry	X			X	
One More Child				X	

Table 4.10: Volunteer Responses to question 10.

The final question in the survey asked: "Would Gospel-centered curriculums and programs that focus on life skills and client empowerment benefit your program?" This final question was designed to help the research assess whether or not churches and Christian non-profits organizations would have a desire to receive resources and curriculum. While meeting tangible needs is important, creating lifelong change can keep some clients from relying on services.

The survey showed that five of the organizations are already using faith-based life skills programs.

- Parker Street Ministry and Lighthouse Ministries both stated that they would be open to exploring other programs even though they already have something in place.
- Kathleen Baptist Church was unsure because they lead pastor would have to approve the program and is content with how the program is currently running.
- Missionary Baptist Church stated that it would possibly be beneficial but volunteers to implement the programs are scarce.
- Finally, The Freedom Tour was unsure.

Synthesis within Ministry Context

Through the trends observed through the interviews and surveys, the writer concluded that churches and Christian non-profits organizations could benefit from three things. The first is training for staff and volunteers on evangelism. The second is an evidence-informed curriculum

to help families achieve self-sufficiency. The third is metrics to help inform whether the services offered to the families are making an impact.

When the writer began working on the dissertation, he also began working with a team at One More Child to create resources for churches and Christian non-profits organizations to help spread the Gospel and provide life skill programs. One More Child took the research and work that is being done well at the organization through their foster care, single moms, anti-trafficking, child hunger, and family support programs and created resources that they could provide and train churches and Christian non-profit organizations to use. The programs created by One More Child are called, *Every Child, Every City*.

Gospel center programs

Through *Every Child, Every City*, One More Child provides three free programs for churches and Christian non-profit organizations to provide for families in need. The other two programs are feeding programs for those who need resources or desire to start a feeding program. These programs consist of Foster Care Wrap Around, Single Moms Community Program, Anti-Trafficking Awareness, and Prevention, and the Backpack Meal program. Each program requires a Memorandum of Understanding. Part of the agreement is that the church or organization using the resources provides an impact report back to One More Child. Through the survey of the feeding programs, one consistent element was that these programs needed something to do the follow-up of their clients.

Single Mom's Community Program. The Single Mom's Community Program is a ten-week program designed to assist mothers on their journey to self-sufficiency. The curriculum helps single moms develop essential skills in parenting and finances while growing spiritually.

The program is designed to be led by volunteers who have a heart for helping, encouraging, and uplifting single mothers and their children. The volunteers are trained by One More Child staff and are equipped with a ten-week curriculum guide to help facilitate discussion and engagement with the participants.

The second program is the Anti-trafficking Awareness and Advocacy program. Through this program, churches and Christian non-profits organizations can host an anti-trafficking awareness and preventions event at their facility led by One More Child staff. Through the training hosted by One More Child staff, families from the community can look for signs of trafficking. Children in disenfranchised communities are often preyed upon by traffickers and are at heightened risk. Churches and Christian non-profits organizations have hosted these events for their clients and church members. The events also have the Gospel woven throughout the program.

The Foster Care Wrap-Around program is designed to support foster parents, relative and non-relative caregivers. Being a foster parent or a non-licensed caregiver to a foster child is rewarding but taxing and challenging, both financially and emotionally. The foster care wrap-around program empowers churches to provide support to Christian and Non-Christian foster parents and non-licensed caregivers. Through this program, the volunteers provide meals, childcare, diapers, services such as laundry and yard work, and prayer and encouragement. The program helps lower the attrition level of the caregivers and helps decrease children having to switch homes due to caregiver burnout. The program is beneficial for Christian homes and is an excellent bridge between Christ and non-Christian caregivers. The Christian volunteers can provide love and care for the non-Christian caregivers to help open Gospel conversations.

Another program that benefits hungry children is the Backpack Meals program. Children in Title 1 schools often go hungry over the weekend due to food insecurity in their homes. One More Child has partnered with Pepsi's Food for Good program and can buy food at wholesale price and then ship the food to non-profits organizations and churches. Once the food is received, volunteers and staff pack six meals plus snacks into bags to be sent home with the students for the weekend. Relationships with the schools are built through the consistency of the volunteers meeting the needs of the students. For example, a local church who partnered with One More Child's Backpack Meals program received a call from a local elementary school receiving backpack meals. The social worker at the school asked the church if they could help a mother whose home burned down. The church rallied around the mother by providing her family with their essential needs and invited the mother to church. Because of the love and care, the mother prayed to receive Christ as her saviour during one of the Sunday morning churches. This story is just one of many examples of Christians bridging the gap with families they are serving in local schools, which resulted in the engagement of the Gospel with the families.

Finally, a church can host a meal packing event. A meal packing event is a one-time event that allows churches and Christian non-profit organizations to pack raw ingredients into pouches that get sealed and packed into boxes for distribution. The church can distribute the meals themselves within their community, donate the meals to local feeding programs, or send the food internationally. The meal-packing program is an opportunity for churches and Christian non-profits organizations to test the reception of their staff and volunteers to feeding programs. If a church decides they want to start a feeding program, One More Child will train the leaders and provide the church with free food donations for them to distribute into their community. The

church also has the opportunity to incorporate other programs such as single moms, foster care wrap-around, and the anti-trafficking awareness and prevention program.

Metrics and tracking

Through the writer's work at One More Child, the writer's team can also help an organization track its metrics and outcomes. After an organization chooses to partner with One More Child, a Memorandum of Understanding²³¹ is created. Next, the church or organization are trained on following the curriculum with their clients. Finally, an ongoing partnership is created, and a requirement of the partnership is for the church or the organization to provide metrics regarding the outcomes they are seeing. The writer is currently working with the team at One More Child to enhance and rewrite the metrics while still making it easy for churches and organizations to do the tracking. While One More Child has an extensive dashboard for tracking metrics within the programs they run, a more sophisticated, yet easy to use tracking system, could benefit the programs the churches and non-profits organizations use.

Evangelism

One More Child builds Gospel conversations throughout the *Every Child, Every City* program curricula. The programs are both evidence-informed regarding life skills and are also filled with Scripture to help the leader link the life skills and services with the Gospel. This tool could be helpful for churches and non-profits organizations looking to participate in the programs.

One More Child also trains its staff and volunteers through three-minute testimony training. The training helps Christians who are not accustomed to sharing their faith with an easy-to-remember system when an opportunity arises in one-on-one interaction with a client. The

²³¹ See Appendix B

training is simple, as it provides why sharing one's faith is essential, the ways to begin a faith conversation, and a process to create an individualized three-minute testimony. The training helps people create a simple statement about why they chose to follow Jesus. Next, the training helps prepare a "before" and "after" statement, intended to help the individual explain their life "before" and "after" Christ. Finally, the training helps the individual prepare a "with" and "without" statement, which helps the individual explain how their life has changed since coming to faith in Jesus and what it would be like without Him. After creating those three statements, they combine to become a three-minute testimony. The final portion of the training helps the individual accept Christ as saviour or connect to a church if they want to learn more.

Through this research, the writer believes this is another element that needs to be added. There is an apparent need for other resources to be added. This will help churches and Christian non-profits organizations be better prepared when opportunities for Gospel Conversation happen. Two organizations that the writer would like to have further conversations with regarding evangelism training is Parker Street Ministry and Lighthouse Ministries. Both organizations appear to have a strong training program for their staff and volunteers. Through collaboration, the writer believes a combination of the training programs can benefit other organizations seeking to increase their ability to share the Gospel.

Summary

As seen in this chapter, there are various ways churches and Christian non-profit organizations are meeting hunger needs within their communities. Many organizations expressed the motivation to feed individuals because of hunger needs that were seen within their community. Christian non-profit organizations have more robust holistic programs for families and have

more measurements for tracking success outcomes. For churches, there appeared to be a weaker area. Both the Christian non-profit organization and churches expressed interest in Gospel-centered life enrichment and empowerment programs for children and families.

Through the survey analysis, interviews, contemporary literature, and Scripture, it is evident that God desires Christians to care for individuals experiencing poverty. Caring for those experiencing poverty can come in different forms, which include physical needs, education, resources, and from a Christian perspective, the Gospel. The information gleaned from this project, and the resources developed at One More Child and those that are being improved on, can be a resource to churches and Christian non-profits organizations to ensure a holistic approach to caring for individuals experiencing poverty. The writer will continue to work with staff at One More Child to enhance the Gospel centered programs, evangelism, and metrics through further research. The writer will then begin to offer non-profits the programs that have been created.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The concept for this project was developed at the beginning of the doctoral journey. Food insecurity and feeding programs have been an area of importance throughout the writer's life and career. The interest was birthed during childhood, where food insecurity was a personal reality. As a child, the writer was fed through the use of food stamps and frequent visits to local food pantries. Programs that enhance quality of life through life skill classes were not offered at the churches and non-profits where we were receiving food. These services would not only have benefited my mother, but could have helped me develop better skills such as finances and how to deal with trauma at an early age, rather than having to learn the hard way as an adult.

As a pastor in college and after college, the writer had students who dealt with food insecurity as well. During my time working at the Department of Children and Families for the State of Florida, it was observed, many of the homes the writer went to lacked food resources. One of the first projects the writer had at One More Child was to start the Child Hunger and Family Support programs for the organization. Through each of these seasons in life, lessons were learned about the importance of helping families receive resources, become equipped with life skills, and receive opportunities for spiritual formation. Providing resources for churches and

Christian non-profit organizations has become part of the writer's career and will continue to be an area of focus.

The purpose of this project was to evaluate data gathered from research and discover areas that could be improved in church and Christian non-profit organization feeding programs. The desire to enhance the feeding programs were birthed out of a better understanding of God's commands to care for the poor as taught in the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures. The research looked for common areas of weakness in the surveyed organizations and a plan to implement and develop new materials for organizations partnering with One More Child.

Lessons Learned

This project expanded the understanding of feeding programs and benefited the writer's current ministry context. The overall project provided the writer with a greater comprehension of the local church's call to serve individuals effected by poverty, and offered better knowledge of how the local church is currently their serving needs. A plethora of books on the subject were reviewed along with a thorough review of Scriptures, as well as insights from experts in the field afforded insights on historical and contemporary issues effecting the poor. The interviews and surveys provided great insight into the best practices of both churches and Christian non-profit organizations. The benefits of the project had a positive impact on the current ministry work of the writer. Four valuable lessons came out of the project.

The first lesson learned was the multitude of areas of the individual's life that are affected by poverty. Chapter two highlighted that individuals in poverty have higher mobility and mortality statistics and lower life expectancy. Financial stressors were highly correlated with health issues and disease. Financial struggles also affected both mental health and social

relationships due to the stressors created by poverty. These two issues combined can cause increased trauma and hardships for the individual. The stressors faced by parents also effected the lives of children. There are higher rates of low birth weight and birth defects, higher rates of sickness, academic issues caused by hunger, mental health issues, and worsened social connections. Alleviating poverty in the lives of individuals and families and providing resources to help individuals gain a higher level of self-sufficiency can potentially reverse some of these issues or ensure some of these negative effects never take place. This leads to the next lesson learned.

The research brought forth the realization that the answer for individuals affected by poverty does not end with meeting their tangible need. A holistic approach of caring for individuals struggling with poverty is important. Those serving them must see those individuals with a lens of what they can become, and they must see the innate ability to develop into the best they can be. Alleviating the noticeable need is fleeting; internal transformation is where sustainable change is found. Understanding of the individuals social and environmental context is needed to help the organizations create appropriate and necessary services for their clients. By equipping those in need with services, such as financial literacy, education, job skills, and spiritual formation, there is a higher chance for some of the issues which are evident within poor communities be alleviated.

The third lesson was the unrelenting value that God placed upon those affected by poverty and those that are serving them. It is evident that God calls the local church to care for them. God set laws pertaining to how the poor should be treated. When His laws were not being followed, He sent prophets to condemn those who were casting the poor aside. God celebrated and exalted those who followed His commands and cared for those lacking resources. Jesus

continued the emphasis on caring for the poor throughout his life and ministry. He was the example of how the local church should care for the poor, and the Early Church continued to be a shining example of what it looks like when the Church loves those affected by poverty. The research provided encouragement through receiving feedback from churches on their responses to identifying needs within their communities and creating programs to meet the need.

The fourth lesson learned is there is great work being done in the central region of Florida. Many of the organizations that were surveyed had unique approaches in their programs. There were strengths and weaknesses in churches and Christian non-profit organizations' approach in caring for those living in poverty. The sharing of resources between Christian non-profit organizations and local churches could strengthen each individual program. Non-profit organizations benefit from social workers who are trained in conducting life skills programs, while churches have volunteers and resources that are readily available to help disciple those who are coming to their programs to be served. The combination of these specialties will provide a holistic approach to caring for those affected by poverty.

Strengths of the Project

Several factors contributed to the success of this project. The writer came into the project with experience working for the church in a pastoral role and over a decade of working in the field of social work. The writer launched a feeding program at One More Child and has worked with a multitude of feeding programs that work with that organization. The experiences afforded an understanding for feeding programs, as well as strengths and weaknesses of organizations, and provided a foundational understanding which allowed for the hypothesis of the research project.

The programs that were surveyed provided strength to the project, as well as their unique approaches to meeting the needs of individuals struggling with poverty. Each non-profit and church had a genuine desire for caring for them. Their honest answers and insights on what programs have provided successful outcomes brought value in identifying potential resources to equip feeding programs seeking to expand their work.

Weaknesses of the Project

A wider range of churches and Christian non-profit organizations could have garnered a wider collection of data to help guide what additional resources could be implemented to strengthen feeding programs. Surveys of clients receiving services from the providers could have provided more insight into what programs are offering the highest degree of positive changes in the lives of clients. These weaknesses present opportunities for future research.

Consideration for Future Research

Four considerations for future research were discovered during this project. The first is researching the short term and long-term effectiveness of life skills programs implemented by feeding programs. Developing a case management system for churches could help them see holistic change in the lives of their clients and provide the opportunity for a case management position in churches, which is not a common position within churches. Key performance indicators and a case management system would be beneficial for the implementation of new curriculums and programs by One More Child.

Another consideration would be researching what type of feeding program provides clients with the greatest sense of dignity. Asking for help is not always an easy task. Some

feeding programs provide preselected items, some programs allow clients to select their own, while other programs allow clients to earn credits for the food they select. Each program has its own advantage for each organization, but it would be interesting to see the advantages and disadvantages from the eyes of the client.

Another consideration is researching what roadblocks are present for churches who are not actively providing care for those living in poverty. There are churches that still struggle to decide whether to start a feeding program. Despite the call for the local church to care for individuals experiencing poverty, a hesitancy that exists is a sense that people lacking resources take advantage of feeding programs by going to multiple feeding program or taking advantage of those who are providing the resources. These perceptions cannot be a reason to give up on the calling. There is a real possibility that there are people who will take advantage of others generosity, but to give up on the whole, because of those who are taking advantage of the system, means that those who need the services are suffering because of something that is outside of their control. Further research regarding the reluctance of churches to starting feeding programs can help provide guidance and answers to some of the objections churches may have. Through the research systems to minimize the risk of individuals taking advantage of the system can be created.

Finally, researching what services provide the best outcomes for children living in poverty could be done. Financial literacy, job skills, and parenting are important and offer great resources for parents affected by poverty. The next step would be supplying resources for children to help break generational poverty. Children living in disenfranchised communities may not have access to higher quality schools and access to as many extra-curricular activities. Parents struggling with poverty may not have the same time resources to provide their children

with guidance as they develop due to having to work multiple jobs or having to work jobs that keep them away from their children. Research that looks services that provide evidence based and highest quality holistic care for the entire family may influence positively poverty rates by equipping families to make long term changes within the generations.

Personal Reflection and Concluding Remarks

This project impacted me both professionally and personally. Professionally, this project provided me with an increased desire to find innovative ways to enhance the effectiveness of churches and Christian non-profits organizations. While I already had compassion for individuals effected by poverty, the studies regarding the mental and physical health of individuals struggling with poverty only increased the sense of urgency and the desire to provide life changing services for those in need. There is an abundance of financial and food resources in the United States of America, while at the same time there is an overabundance of needs. My desire is to connect the resources that are available and the needs that are present in the lives of families and empower Christians to be the answer to these needs.

Spiritually, this project brought me closer to the heart of God. The study showed me that God's heart for those who are disenfranchised has remained the same from the Torah to the New Testament and beyond. God condemned those who had resources and were unwilling to care for those in need and consistently provided love to those who were without.²³² Jesus consistently made time to care for those society looked down upon and inspired those around Him to do the

²³² Deuteronomy 10:18, Exodus 22:22, Exodus 23:11

same. My desire is to become more like Christ in the ways He treated those in need and the ways he empowered those around him to meet others' needs.²³³

The local church, through Christ, can and must be the answer to poverty. The non-profit organizations and the churches surveyed all had their own unique and amazing attributes within their programs. There are numerous other feeding programs that exist both locally and globally that are making a major impact in the lives of individuals experiencing poverty. Strength will come when Christians do not try to tackle hunger alone, and instead understand there is strength in collaboration. This project has inspired me to enhance the work I am doing and bring about excellence in the programs Christian non-profits and churches are leading. This is the calling God has placed on my heart. Until the Lord calls me home, I will follow Christ's lead and be a leader in the work of alleviating the suffering of individuals experiencing poverty.

²³³ Matthew 15:29-39, Matthew 19:21, Matthew 25:35-40, Luke 14:13

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent **SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY**

Title: Components of Christian Feeding Programs

Investigator(s): Leon Battle, Doctoral Candidate in Ministry, Dr. Jim Vigil, Primary Investigator

Purpose: The research will examine Christian feeding programs and will examine what life skill programs are being provided, such as, financial literacy, career counseling, parenting, etc. and how the programs are sharing the gospel.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks by participating in this study.

Benefits: The information gained from this research will help create models for a well-rounded Christian feeding program.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

Confidentiality: Your informed consent and survey answers will be sent to a link at SurveyMonkey.com where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Survey Monkey does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers.

Contact: If you have questions about this project, you may contact the researcher, Leon Battle via email at lcbattle@seu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office: IRB@seu.edu

By continuing, you are indicating that you freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You also are acknowledging that you are at least 18 years of age.

It is recommended that you print a copy of this page before beginning the survey.

APPENDIX B



MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING Single Moms Community Program Initiative

This Memorandum of Understanding (this “**MOU**”) is made and entered into this _____ day of _____, 20____, by and between Florida Baptist Children’s Homes, Inc., a Florida not-for-profit corporation, doing business as One More Child (“**OMC**”), and _____ (the “**Organization**”).

Background

- A. The Single Moms Community Program (the “**SMCP**”) is a way for community partners to assist and encourage local single mothers by hosting a 10-week community program.
- B. This MOU establishes the Commitment between OMC and the Organization to host a 10-week SMCP for families in _____ (county). Classes for the SMCP will begin on _____ located at _____ from _____ am/pm to _____ am/pm.

I. Rights and Obligations

- A. OMC’s responsibilities under this agreement shall be to use commercially reasonable efforts to:
 - 1. Provide curriculum, volunteer job descriptions, and recruitment tips
 - 2. Train leaders and volunteer mentors
 - 3. Collect weekly data and stories
 - 4. Readily be available for questions, concerns, and comments
- B. The Organization’s Responsibilities under this agreement shall be to use commercially reasonable efforts to:
 - 1. Provide a leader who is committed to teaching the 10-week curriculum from _____ to _____.
 - 2. Host training on _____, led by OMC staff.
 - 3. Recruit a minimum of two (2) and no more than ten (10) Single Moms per class.
 - 4. Provide a meeting space for the community program, a childcare space, including the Organization’s approved and screened childcare volunteers, a weekly meal, and weekly blessing baskets.
 - 5. Report weekly data and stories to OMC via an electronic reporting form.
 - 6. Will not make any changes to OMC’s SCMP curriculum or materials.
 - 7. Publicly support the partnership and include OMC branding, logo, and language when advertising and referring to the OMC SMCP.
 - 8. Meet with OMC Initiative’s Team to review the execution of the SMCP, provide feedback and discuss the launch of any subsequent SMCPs.

C. Term

1. The term of this MOU shall be effective upon the signature of both Parties authorized officials and shall be in force from - (30 days post planned graduation date).

D. Ownership of Property

1. Materials provided to Organization by OMC, including the Launch Kit, shall be and remain the exclusive intellectual property of OMC.
2. Organization shall follow the branding guidelines for the SMCP provided by OMC, including when and when not to use, and how to use, the logos and other intellectual property of OMC.
3. Organization agrees that Organization is the promoter of the SMCP and shall have exclusive responsibility for all damages and liabilities arising out hosting the program.
4. OMC shall be permitted to use without restriction all information arising out of the SMCP provided to OMC by the Organization, including “report data and stories”, provided by attendees, and observed by OMC.

II. Termination

- A. Either party may terminate this MOU and the obligations hereunder for any reason or no reason upon fourteen (14) days prior written notice to the other party’s Contact.
- B. This MOU may be terminated at any time by the mutual written agreement of the parties
- C. This MOU may be terminated by a party immediately by written notice to the other party upon a material breach of this MOU by the other party.

III. Miscellaneous

- A. The following persons shall administer this MOU for OMC and the Organization (each a “**Contact**”) and shall be contacted with respect to notices, consents, or other communications with respect to this MOU:

For OMC:

Name:

Phone Number:

Email:

Address:

For the Organization:

Name:

Phone Number:
Email:
Address:

B. If a Force Majeure Event (as defined below) occurs, the party whose obligation under this MOU is delayed or prevented in whole or in part (the “**Affected Party**”), will notify the other party within three (3) days after learning of such Force Majeure Event. Notwithstanding the foregoing, a Force Majeure Event will excuse the performance of a particular action by the Affected Party only for so long as such matter actually causes delay in the Affected Party’s performance of its obligations. “**Force Majeure Event**” means acts of God, fire, floods, storms, hurricanes, explosions, accidents, epidemics, pandemics (including COVID-19), war, civil disorders, strikes and/or other labor difficulties, shortages and/or failure of supply of materials, labor, fuel, power, equipment, supplies and/or transportation, and/or delays caused or actions prevented by any law, rule, regulation, order and/or other action adopted and/or taken by any national, regional and/or local governmental authority (including local, state, and national orders with respect to COVID-19), and/or by any other cause not reasonably within a party’s control, whether or not specifically mentioned herein.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have signed this MOU to be effective as of the date first written above.

OMC:

Florida Baptist Children’s Homes, Inc., a Florida
not for profit corporation, d/b/a as One More Child

By: _____

Name:

Title:

Date:

ORGANIZATION:

By: _____

Name:

Title:

Date:

