

session 11 study guide

serving the poor and oppressed

starter

MY WORLD: Visit the World Vision website at worldvision.org/ sponsor (or a similar site) to view pictures and videos of needy children in third-world countries. Now write a description of what their lives are like: their living conditions, food, clothing, families, health, work and so on. Then list the needs the people have.

Description of these people's lives:

Description of these people's needs:

As an option, before the meeting arrange for a missionary to or immigrant from a third-world country to describe the living situation of the poor in his or her country (or have someone role-play someone from a third-world country). If possible, share photographs.

message

Jesus cares deeply for the poor and oppressed. He uses our care for them to draw them closer to Himself, but He also uses the opportunity to change us for eternity. In this way, by giving of ourselves, we actually receive back. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus used a simple parable to describe what will happen when we reach out in His name to lift up the helpless:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me."

They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?"

He will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

1. Which group of people did Jesus, the King, reward?

2. What did the King say that the "sheep" or "those on His right" did that deserved an eternal reward?

3. How did the people on His right respond to His description of their acts of service?

4. What does their response say about their character?

5. Why do you think the “goats” or “those on His left” were surprised by their punishment?

6. What do the attitudes of the “sheep” and the “goats” tell you about how Jesus values our service?

7. What point is Jesus making when He says, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (verse 40)?

8. Anyone can do acts of kindness—it is the motivation by which we serve that we honor God. In Luke 14:12-14, Jesus says, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite

you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” To whom do these verses say we should reach out? Why?

9. Why is kindness to those who can repay us different from service to Christ?

10. When do these verses say the righteous (the ones who, with Christ’s help, do what is right) will be rewarded?

dig

When we look at those in need, we can see Jesus. By serving those whom Jesus loves with the right motives, we serve Jesus.

1. What makes it difficult to see the world through the eyes of Jesus?

2. What should be our response as Christians to hunger and poverty?

3. Who does Jesus say He loves more?

- ☐ the mature, healthy person
- ☐ the poor, oppressed person
- ☐ the successful, compassionate person
- ☐ the scared, lonely person
- ☐ the person who tries but fails
- ☐ none of the above

4. Have you ever felt as though by helping another person you were in reality helping Jesus?
If so, when and how?

5. What is the major temptation Christians face when given opportunities to serve?

6. What are some ways to avoid this temptation?

apply

If we never go outside of the four walls of our youth group or church, then our interpretation of Jesus' words in Matthew 25:31-46 might look something like the following:

I Was Hungry

I was hungry,
and you formed a humanities group
to discuss my hunger.

I was imprisoned,
and you crept off quietly
to your chapel
and prayed for my release.

I was naked,
and in your mind
you debated the morality
of my appearance.

I was sick,
and you knelt and thanked God
for your health.

I was homeless,
and you preached to me
of the spiritual shelter of the
love of God.

I was lonely,
and you left me alone
to pray for me.
You seem so holy, so close to God.
But I am still very hungry—
and lonely—and cold.¹

1. If you were the person in need speaking in this poem, what would you want from the other person?

2. Have you ever responded to needs like you see in this poem? If so, in what specific ways?

3. What has kept you from meeting the needs of “the least of these” that you encounter?

4. What does the way in which Christians respond to a need tell the lost people of this world about Jesus?

5. If God reaches out to all, then those who seek to honor Him should reach out to others as well. What can you do personally and as part of your group to make a positive impact in this world?

6. What is one thing your group could do to help fight both physical and spiritual hunger and poverty?

reflect

Consider the following statistics. Try to imagine that you live in a setting where these events are everyday occurrences:

- Every 1.2 seconds, a child is born into poverty.²
- Every 3 seconds, a child dies from disease.³
- Every 7 seconds, a child dies from hunger.⁴
- Every 8 seconds, a child dies from water-born illness due to unclean water supplies.⁵

- Every 15 seconds, a child becomes an orphan.⁶
- Current studies show that there are about 16,500 people groups in the world and that approximately 9,500 of these groups have been reached with the gospel.⁷
- Child sexual abuse has been reported up to 80,000 times a year, although the number of unreported instances is probably greater because children are often afraid to tell anyone what has happened.⁸

1. How do you feel when you read these statements?

2. Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, once prayed, “May my heart break with the things that break the heart of God.” What do you think he meant by this?

3. When it comes to serving others, which of the following best describes you?

- ☐ I’m heading in the right direction.
- ☐ I still have a ways to go.
- ☐ I’m not sure what to do.
- ☐ I struggle with selfishness.

4. James 1:27 states, “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.” Why does James place such an emphasis on serving the poor and helpless?

5. What does James mean by stating this is “religion” God accepts as “pure and faultless”? How does this affect your view of “religion”?

6. What one principle from this study can you use as a new goal for your life today?

meditation



All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor,
the very thing I was eager to do.

GALATIANS 2:10

Notes

1. Quoted in John R.W. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).
2. "Introduction to Poverty Facts and Information," Poverty Program. <http://www.povertyprogram.com/pov.html>.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. "Orphan Statistics," Habitat for Humanity, www.hfgf.org/statistics.pdf.
7. "The Unreached Peoples and Their Role in the Great Commission," Global Frontier Missions, 2010. <http://www.globalfrontiermissions.org/unreached.html>.
8. "Facts for Families: Child Sexual Abuse," American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, March 2011, no. 9. <http://aacap.org/page.wv?name=Child+Sexual+Abuse§ion=Facts+for+Families>.