

## Chapter 4

### Looking at Poverty from God's Perspective

We know that we are committed in Rescue Ministry to addressing the needs of the poor. So, what is our definition of poverty? If you define poverty, or the state of being poor, the same way that the majority of your North American neighbors do, you diminish your ministry. If poverty is limited to a lack of material resources, then all we need to do is to provide shelter, food, and clothing, and we will meet the needs of the poor.

Apparently, poverty in God's eyes is far different. In Revelation 3:17, Jesus tells a bunch of well-off folks that they are miserably impoverished. Jesus often talked about the advantage of being materially impoverished while also identifying real needs that He desired to fill.

Look at some of the ways the people coming through our doors seeking help are actually poor:

Poverty of support – We know one of the major causes of homelessness is the breakdown of the family. When you have no support system, either through your extended family or through a church, you are impoverished.

Poverty of the soul – People are created with deep longings that distinguish humans from other animal life. We have a deep longing to be loved, really loved, for who we are and not who we must become. We have a longing to be significant, to have worth. When these longings are not met, there is deep poverty that cannot be satisfied with some substitute that is less than the real thing.

Poverty of values – an empty life, with no standards, no beliefs, leading to many other forms of poverty.

The list is actually much more extensive...poverty of perspective, of safety, of skills, of morals, of self-respect, of addiction, of contentment, and on and on. We would do well to study those who have come our way, to observe their real condition before just feeling okay to give them the presenting surface needs.

The real question is what we do with these observations. How would you reach out to someone who has an evident poverty of beliefs and convictions? We in Rescue understand that Truth sets people free, and without truth, a person remains in bondage. We have an obligation to address this poverty.

Take a strong look at how you meet needs. A person comes in to sign up for a bed for the night. As the person at the front desk, you have only a minute as you take his information and move to the next person. During that minute can you feed the need in front of you by giving respect, value, love,

compassion, and acceptance by the way you look at the person and respond verbally? Looking a person squarely in the eye and calling him or her by name and even title, adds to their sense of being.

More and more research is connecting the life style of poverty with the lack of relationship. Bryant Myers, in his book *Walking with The Poor*, describes poverty as “the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable” (p.86).

Brian Filkert, in his book *When Helping Hurts*, refers to a “loss of meaning, purpose, and hope.” He specifies four areas to address. “The crucial thing is to help people to understand their identity as image bearers, to love their neighbors as themselves, to be stewards over God’s creation, and to bring glory to God in all things” (Filkert p.145). Filkert makes a compelling case that poverty is the result of brokenness in four key relationships: with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation. If one of my goals is to address poverty, and if I agree with this definition, then I will need to do far more than meet the crisis need of the individual seeking help.

<b><u>Relational Brokenness</u></b>	<b><u>Relational Poverty</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship with God</li> <li>• Relationship with self</li> <li>• Relationship with others</li> <li>• Relationship with creation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty of spiritual intimacy</li> <li>• Poverty of being</li> <li>• Poverty of community</li> <li>• Poverty of stewardship</li> </ul>

We know we must be addressing the Poverty of spiritual intimacy (relationship with God). But we also must address the Poverty of being (my devaluing of who I am in Him), Poverty of community (my need to fill a role in the lives of others), and Poverty of stewardship (my willingness to care for God’s creation).

Relational poverty is a reflection of relational brokenness and needs to be addressed if we are hoping to see people come to abundant living.

What you envision as the need, and what you determine to be your goal, will affect the direction you take and ultimately the impact you have.

1 Samuel 2:8 “He raises the poor from the dust. He lifts the needy from the ash heap.”

Proverbs 14:21 “Happy is he who is gracious to the poor.”

Proverbs 28:27 “He who gives to the poor will never want.”

Proverbs 29:7 “The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor.”

Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger’s mother read in the newspaper that he had a “poor” beginning. That upset her. “He had a humble beginning,” she would say. She and seven children walked to church every Sunday, many times in mended clothes. She felt they were rich in the things that really mattered.