

# **GODFIRST & THE POOR**

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# CHAPTER 1

## 7 BIBLICAL MOTIVATIONS TO HONOUR THE POOR

The bible refers to the following primary vulnerable groups that we are to care for:

- Widows
- Orphans
- Immigrants
- Poor
- Prisoners
- Sick and Dying

Whilst most people know that they should help the poor, they lack lasting and compelling motivation to do so. Here are seven powerful motivators from scripture:

### 1. THE JOB MOTIVATION

*I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing. **I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban.** I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the immigrant/stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth (Job 29:12-1)*

*"If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless; but from my youth I reared him as would a father, and from my birth I guided the widow; if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment, and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint. For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things. (Job 31:16-23)*

### 2. IMAGO DEI MOTIVATION

Human beings are **creations** not **accidents** (Gen 1:26). It is for this reason that we must treat each other well (Gen 9:6 and Jms 3:9). C.S. Lewis says, *'There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. It is immortals with whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit'*. Incredibly, because of God's *image in us, we are beings of infinite, inestimable value*. The Doctrine of the Image of God was at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement. MLK Jnr said: *The whole concept of Imago Dei is the idea that all man have been injected by God, and there are no gradations in the image of God.*

### 3. THE STEWARDSHIP MOTIVATION

Mankind is commissioned by God to steward the earth's resources (Gen 1:28) but not own them (Ps 24:1). All we have belongs to God, which was why King David could

write, 'Wealth and honour come from you, you are the ruler of all things. Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand' (1 Chr 29:11). This is counter-intuitive for us Westerners who believe that our success in life is mainly of our own doing. Certainly, the bible concurs that hard work is a vital element to success (Pr 6), but it is never the main reason. If you had been born on a mountain-top in Tibet in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century instead of Joburg in the 21<sup>st</sup>, no matter how industrious you were, you wouldn't have had too much to show for it.

And God says we must limit our profits and give to the poor (Dt 24:14-19: "When you are harvesting your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back and get it. It is for the immigrant, fatherless and widow.") In God's eyes it belongs to them.

#### **4. THE GOSPEL MOTIVATION**

The gospel is to gradually impact every area of our lives. Jesus told us to love one another as he has loved us (Jn 13:34), and he loved us as the Rich One becoming poor for our sakes that we might become rich in all things (2 Cor 8:9).

#### **5. THE APOSTLES' MOTIVATION**

*Gal 2:9* James, Peter and John agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

At a church strategic planning session, the apostles eagerly agree that 'remembering the poor' is not optional.

#### **6. THE JESUS MOTIVATION**

*Lk 4:18-19* "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."

When Jesus announces his mission in Luke's gospel, and quotes directly from Isaiah, we see how prominently the poor feature. Jesus hones in on "the poor", "the prisoners", "the blind" and the "oppressed". These groups were to be at the focused attention of Jesus' ministry on earth.

#### **7. THE ISAIAH MOTIVATION**

In Isaiah 58 we learn just how important to God it is that believers remember the poor. We are told to 'spend ourselves on behalf of the hungry' (Is 58:10).

#### ***Bono:***

*Those who read Scripture and don't come away with God's preferential concern for the poor are just blind.*

# CHAPTER 2

## PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

### Our Guiding Principles

- 1. Zero Option:** honouring the poor is imperative for all Christians and Churches (Gal 2; Is 58, Lk 4).
- 2. Zeal and Wisdom:** in view of the complexities of creating sustainable and effective ministries to the poor, both zeal and wisdom are required.
- 3. Gospel and Social Action:** the bible tells us to love and help the poor, even without the motivation of seeing them come to a saving faith in Christ. However, this kind of social action by Believers will inevitably produce converts. Furthermore, social action alone does not change hearts at a deep level, which often reduces the impact of the social action. So, wherever possible we try to always have a genuine gospel element to our social action.

### Our 3 Levels

Tim Keller recommends thinking about ministry to the poor at three levels:

- 1. Emergency Relief:** This refers to initiatives such as emergency food, shelter, health, and legal aid.
- 2. Community Development:** This refers to moving an individual, family or community from dependency on relief to sustainability. It would involve initiatives such as education and job creation.
- 3. Social Reform:** This involves biasing the laws and conscience of the nation towards the vulnerable.

### Our 3 Categories

- 1. Godfirst Individuals:** We encourage all individuals to be involved with the poor in some capacity. Background roles would include praying for and encouraging those in the 'front line' and giving 'cash and kind', especially to Godfirst Initiatives. Front Line roles refer to playing some kind of hands-on role in poor ministry.
- 2. G1 Initiatives:** Godfirst has a number of specific initiatives that fall directly under the oversight of the church. Also, Godfirst Life Group initiatives for the poor, whether a one-off or a more regular connection, needs the thumbs-up from their Site Leader and Rachel O'Connor who works centrally in this area. This 'thumbs up' is to enhance the effectiveness and support of Life Group's in this area.
- 3. Partnerships:** This is when Godfirst, or a Life Group within Godfirst, humbly comes along side an existing non-Godfirst project or organisation, and helps out in some way. There is no government involved, just humble support.

NB: These 3 levels and 3 categories form our basic grid to help determine the how's and what's of our involvement with the poor.

# CHAPTER 3

## WHAT IS GODFIRST DOING?

### 1. Provoking Individuals

We continuously provoke one another to actively honour the poor. See the Chapter 4 for practical tips for individuals.

### 2. We give away lots of money

We give 20% of gross income away to (a) Church Planting and (b) The Poor. We also do regular gift Sundays to raise money and clothes/blankets/food for the poor. Current regular recipients of money for the poor are:

- **Dihlabeng:** this is a base church in Clarens, Free State that is doing outstanding work amongst the poorest of the poor  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/10429032@N08/sets/72157602057269011/>
- **JASA:** The Justice Alliance of South Africa is a unique ministry in Cape Town that petitions government to change to laws that discriminate against the vulnerable.  
<http://www.jasa.za.net/>
- **Philile:** See below for details on Philile.

The money for church planting goes to (a) funding church plants for their first year, including some Godfirst sites (b) funding churches who work in poor situations (c) strengthening church leaders through training events.

**3. Philile** (*Zulu for I am alive; full of life*) exists to uplift disadvantaged communities through early childhood development. This is achieved through running pre-schools which offer quality education and care. Philile aspires to not only to provide excellence in education, but to see the physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social development of children addressed, alongside employing and training teachers from the local community. Philile aims to introduce and develop new strategies for inner city and urban education; breaking the cycle of underachievement in socially and economically deprived areas  
[www.philile.org](http://www.philile.org)

### 4. Adoptions

We currently have three eldership couples who are in the process of adopting children. We provide advice and support for couples considering adoption. For more info please contact Rachel O'Connor. [rachel@philile.org](mailto:rachel@philile.org)

### 5. We partner with other initiatives

We are currently sharing our time, talents and treasures with the following initiatives:

- Yeoville Boys Primary School
- Oasis Haven [www.oasishaven.org](http://www.oasishaven.org)
- Trumpet Call Farming Initiative in Zimbabwe [www.foundationsforfarming.org](http://www.foundationsforfarming.org)

### 6. We plant Godfirst Sites

Churches are beacons of hope for communities, and empower believers to help the poor, and are a source of finance and talent for ministry to the poor.

# CHAPTER 4

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR INDIVIDUALS

### 1. Providing for family members

It is biblical to provide for needy members of our extended families. Often this does require wisdom since manipulation by needy family members, including parents, is not biblical. With parents, the bible tells children to obey, but everyone to *honour* their parents. As an adult you can honour them without obeying them. There is no biblical obligation to provide in cases where family members are demanding assistance as a result of laziness or a desire to live an inappropriately lavish lifestyle. In all situations of providing for needy family members, put firm boundaries in place and be crystal clear on expectations.

### 2. Involvement in our local church initiatives

Supporting GodFirst Initiatives and Partnerships through giving of treasure, time and talents is a great option because (a) church initiatives ensure a good blend of 'pure gospel' and direct 'social action', and (b) church initiatives are sustainable due to the strong base of leaders and volunteers. Here are ways to get involved in church initiatives:

- **Give monthly tithes and offerings:** 20% of GodFirst's income goes directly or indirectly to the poor and gospel advance (church planting). The privilege/discipline of giving monthly 10% or more of your gross income to the church enables us to pack a significant punch together, and over the medium-term usually produces more resources for the poor than periodic, one-off gifts.
- **Participate in GodFirst Gift Days and Collections for the Poor.**
- **Life Groups:** GodFirst Life Groups are encouraged to have an outlet for 'remembering the poor' (Gal 2). This might be 'one-off's' that assist a ministry with the poor in time or money, or some Life Groups might even develop a longer term relationship with a particular ministry. Please note the Life Groups are asked to run their ideas by Rachel O'Connor and their Site Leader before putting it into action. This is to help ensure that the various endeavours are wise and strategic. For example, two Life Groups might be doing something similar and can be put in touch with each other to learn from each other.

### 3. Supporting those in the front-lines

In GodFirst there are many whose jobs bring them into contact with the poor and marginalised in our city. We can pray for and encourage those who teach in disadvantaged schools, work as social workers, are involved in politics and civil Service, work in public hospitals, and assisting refugees.

### 4. Be good employers

Many of us employ or manage staff from poorer backgrounds in our homes or places of work. Let's do the following: create safe working environments; have progressive labour contracts with fair hours of work and leave; pay a good wage; support the institution of marriage and family, for example by allowing a domestic worker's

family to live on site or visit regularly; up-skilling: there is a vast skills gap in the South African workforce, and we can help to fill this gap by investing in training and mentoring, in a way that communicates God's value for each human being.

### **5. Starting or supporting a project**

As God brings a need to your attention, He may open a door for us to develop an initiative that addresses that need. These may or may not come under the oversight of the local church. For example if you have a heart for rape victims, you could contact your local police station to enquire whether they provide victim support. If you realise that HIV/AIDS is an unaddressed issue in your place of work, you could seek to bring change in this area. As God pinpoints areas of injustice and need, he will take us on an exciting journey as he shows us how we can get involved. You don't need to have GodFirst's formal 'covering' or blessing to be involved with these initiatives.

These are just a few of the initiatives that GodFirst members are serving in:

- Africa We Want: Tutoring programme
- My Life My Africa: Youth and Sport
- 
- Project Hope: Health care

### **6. Everyday generosity**

There are many small, practical ways that we can help the needy with whom we come into contact overcome the challenges of everyday life: offering to call back those who can't afford airtime, offering lifts, passing on good quality children's clothing, allowing someone to use the washing machine.

### **7. Response to beggars**

First and foremost, acknowledge the person as a person, look them in the eye, chat to them or at least smile, it costs you nothing. Giving food is usually better than giving money. Where possible, offering beggars some kind of 'work for food' or 'work for money' is good. Keep clothes to give away to them. Try and develop relationships with those we see regularly and ask God to lead us as to whom, when and what to give.

**8. Showing respect:** There are many ways of showing respect for those who are often disregarded - offering the cleaner at work a cup of tea, asking after the family of the security guard, inviting the 'less privileged' person to sit in the front seat of your car, and so on. The apostle James asks us to treat all with equal respect. Deliberately taking time on a Sundays (and every other day) to speak with those from very different backgrounds to ours honours the equality Christ won for us on the Cross.

**9. Praying for individuals:** When we see someone who is sick or needy, we should pray for them. Prayer is powerful vertically (it moves God to act) and horizontally (a significant expression of love for the person).

## **10. Hospitality**

Offering hospitality across Johannesburg's society divisions is a wonderful expression of unity. Inviting those who are probably not in a position to invite us back (Luke 14:12-14) and accepting reverse invitations if they do come our way, allows us to start sharing lives and finding out what we have in common. Learning about the diversity of cultures, languages and food that exist in our city can be a taste of heaven!

## **11. Remember Teamwork**

Supporting those with many practical and spiritual needs can be draining and at times overwhelming. Creating supportive networks through Life Groups or other groups can help to avoid burn-out. Working as a team can also help relieve concern over safety.

## **12. Praying for the city and nation**

Sustained prayer against poverty and injustice is a powerful weapon to see change happen.

## **13. Be a voice**

We can raise issues that come to our attention, where the poor have no voice in our city. For example if we hear that informal settlement residents in our local ward have been waiting for government housing for many years, we can contact the ward councillor and ask for an update on their behalf. Or if we become aware that support staff in our place of work are being exploited, we can assist them in requesting fair conditions. We can seek to follow local policy developments at municipal and national government levels, in order to speak up for justice in these areas. Our support can help those who are in particularly vulnerable or harmful situations to have the courage to seek help.

### **Contact**

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