

Practically Helping the Poor

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[0:00] Last week we looked at the problem of poverty and we saw that the problem of being poor is! both more complex than we tend to think and that those who have money and with a roof over their head! they suffer from the same problems that plague the poor. But this week we want to look at more practicals, do's and don'ts when it comes to helping those who come to our front gate at home or come visit us at church or at our at the traffic lights and we want to help us we want to help think through these things on a much more practical level and so to do that here are some questions for us to grapple with. So the first question what does it take to raise a well-adjusted independent resilient successful adult? Hopefully you can say well I've that's happened to me. Well how long did it take to raise you to be where you are today? Well in South Africa many would say well it takes about 18 years.

Some of the young adults now are 18 years old. Parents are they? How ready are they? 18 year olds how ready are you?

Well it sometimes takes a little bit longer but pick it at 20 to 25 years. But pick it at 20 years, just make it round and round figure 20 years of constant constructive input to make sure you don't have kids living at your house long term. Now last week we looked at the cost of homelessness and we saw it was it was quite a cost wasn't it? Over 700 million rand a year is spent by the city of Cape Town. This is not going to help us. I'm just I'm going to give it but then you're going to forget all about it. Do you know how much money it costs to raise your child until they're 18? So there is a cost involved. Kids listen up.

It costs your parents between 1.7 million and 3 million rand over your 18 years. That's a lot of love. So after the service you're going to go give them a big hug and say thank you.

Now that's when everything goes well. It gets much more complicated when you don't come from a quote unquote good home.

[2:43] If you don't have constructive inputs but destructive inputs. Neglect. No stable relationships in the home. Especially no father figure.

When you've got unchecked stress and anxiety. You've got emotional, physical or sexual abuse going on. It just takes much longer and much more additional help to to help people coming from broken backgrounds to be independent to be stable and successful. I mean it takes most of us even coming from a good background.

It's hard work. Much more hard work. Much more long term when you've got brokenness. Okay. Second question. Is raising a child about only meeting short term immediate needs? Or is it also including more long term planning and effort and energy and input?

Okay. Now you all know the answer to that. You need both. When your kids are young. They need immediate input. They need food. They need clothing. They need their nappies changed.

When they're teenagers. They need food. They need clothing and a few less nappies hopefully. But you need long term development. It's not only about you don't raise people to be successful and independent.

[4:09] And successful in the broadest sense of the term. You don't raise them by just giving in to immediate needs all the time. You've got to think and plan more long term. All of you have raised your kids. You help them make wise decisions. You help them how to think through problems.

You help them how to communicate well. How to regulate their emotions. Basically all the things you need to hold down a job and raise a family with minimal damage to others.

And so the same things that are needed to raise kids are needed to help those in need. It takes time. There's just no quick fix. And you have to balance between short term immediate help that keeps him alive.

So that longer term development and change can happen. Okay. So our first big question we need to answer when we're practically helping the poor is what do we mean by help?

What do we mean by help? And so what is giving a helping hand all about? Helping is giving assistance. So just to define what helping is. I mean we probably know this but just to get us on the same page.

[5:23] Helping is giving assistance through yourself or your resources to make it easier or possible for someone to do something or to get something done that they're struggling with.

The essence of it is giving someone something they need but that they don't have themselves to help them out of a situation that's causing them a problem.

That's the essence of help is you're giving someone something that they don't have.

They're stuck and they don't want to be there but they can't not be there unless someone comes alongside and helps them. Does that make sense? Does that make sense? And we help the needy because this is exactly the help that God has given to each of us.

In our near testament passage in James, James is instructing the Christians how to help those in need. Basically saying don't treat them differently to others. So James chapter 2 verse 2.

[6:31] My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, you must not show favoritism. Don't be partial when people walk into your church and you've got the rich and the poor.

Don't treat the rich nicely and the poor badly. But it's the reason I want to focus on for now. In James 2 verse 5 he says this, Has God not chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

And we saw last week that whether you have a home or don't have a home, whether you deepen addictions to drugs or whether you can't break out of destructive emotional thoughts in your brain, just sin, we all belong to this world of sin.

We've all got this problem. We're all in need. And God sees how needy and helpless the human race is. God knows that we can't really do anything to get ourselves out of the mess that we're in. And he initiates the first step. He chooses us. He reaches down and says, Hey, man, I can see you struggling. Let me come and help you.

[7:48] God knows that he has to start the process of salvation. He starts the process of change. He starts the process of help. If he doesn't do it, it's not going to happen.

But it's the same with people. It's the same with us. When we're stuck, I need someone to come and help me. And so the first step in a process of change for someone doesn't often come from within themselves.

You heard from Brandon, yes, just one day, yeah, you just had enough of the cold and the wet and the rain. We had guys that come up from Africa when I was working at U-Turn.

And they're from north, in the middle of Africa. And Cape Town winter is a shock to the system. The rain and just nonstop raining. And so he says, no, Brandon woke up one day, I can't live like this anymore.

But he wouldn't have got far if he hadn't had people helping him and saying, come, let me help you along this road. Help comes from outside.

[8:50] Someone has to help to start making those first steps. Yes? A poor person or person stuck in addiction, you know, whether they're homeless or not is actually besides the point.

They'll learn to walk by themselves later on. But like anyone that's got kids, you've got to show them how to take those first steps. And just as God took those first steps with us, helping us when we were helpless, we need to do the same for others.

James goes on to say in chapter 2 from verse 14, he says this, In the same way, faith by itself, if it's not accompanied by actions, is dead.

And so God wants us to be a people of faith, but also a people of action. You can't, in our minds, we tend to separate the two. But in God's mind and in the way the Bible talks, it doesn't keep them separate.

You can't claim to have one if you don't do the other. Now practically, that means taking the first step with someone who needs help.

[10:19] The first few steps. Okay, so someone is at your gate or, you know, at the traffic lights, but let's assume they're at the gate. God wants you to take the first steps of helping them.

In the same way that he took the first steps of helping you. And the first steps is often short-term immediate relief. You've got to treat them with respect and kindness as you would others.

And so, when someone pitches up at your gate, here are some helpful ways to help and some not so helpful ways. So just looking at some practical do's and don'ts.

So first thing, treat them like any other person that you don't know. Okay, you're not rude to people you don't know. You're polite to people you don't know. What I tend to say is it's good to have a mini conversation with the people.

Introduce yourself. Hey, I can see you in trouble. My name's Dylan. What is your name? Oh, Frankie. Okay, Frankie. Nice to meet you.

[11:21] Frankie, where do you stay? No, I stay on the streets. Oh, that's rough. Oh, no, I stay in Parkwood. Oh, that's even more rough. Why do you need help, my man?

No. Then the story comes. Then you've got to practice patience. But you know, you can also just be straightforward. Say, listen, I don't have time for a long story, but just tell me what's going on.

Don't assume they need food or water. There could be something else. Ask them what it is that they're looking for. What is it that you need? Ask what you can pray for.

Okay? I can give you a few things. I can't give you everything you need right now. I'm going to help you with what I can. What can I pray for you? Best to pray with your eyes open. I'm just...

It's just a joke. Pray with one eye open. Well, what I do is I often go outside my gate.

[12:26] So I tend not to stand inside my gate and talk to them. Because you get that barrier. It's like you're in the... They're behind the trolleys or you're behind the trolleys. So open the gate.

Go stand outside. If it's safe, be careful. This is South Africa. Silly thing, but put your dogs away if they're barking like crazy. Just say, sorry, man.

Let me just put my dogs away so he's not barking here. Things like that. Just to start the conversation. So it's not just, oh, man, I need this. Okay, fine. And you disappear. You give it. And they're going on their way again.

Just start a little bit of a conversation. See what's going on. Give them your name. Ask them their name. And then you know them next time. Oh, yeah, and you'll forget their name or whatever. But at least you know them next time.

Secondly, be honest about your ability to help. If you're busy, you're busy. So if someone comes to see me at the office that I'm not expecting, and it could be one of you, and they just pop in and just this and that, I say, oh, listen, I'd really love to discuss what you need to discuss, but I'm busy with something at the moment.

[13:32] Can we make a time to meet? Okay? Now, it's much more difficult with guys who are on the street to make a time and a place, because time and place is a little bit wild out there.

But just, if you're busy, just say, listen, I want to help you, but I'm busy with something right now. I don't have a lot of time to chat. And then make a time. If you can't help them immediately, give them an option to come another time.

Listen, I'm busy right now. I can't run around and do stuff that you need. But later on in the week, and then just have a thought when in your week you could possibly just have a little bit of time to speak to someone. Tell them to come back another time.

A good idea. Have a chat with your family, especially if you've got kids. It's easy as a guy to do this. It's not so easy as a girl to do this, or as a granny that's even more hard, because of safety concerns.

But have a chat with the family, so that you're all on the same page. When is a good time? When is not a good time? And don't be shy to tell them, look, it's not a good time right now.

[14:39] Just so that they're aware. Communication is key. For example, if all you can do is make a sandwich, say, look, I can make a quick sandwich, but that's all I can do for you for now.

If you want more help, it's going to require much more time, and I don't have time for that at the moment. I used to get guys at my gate on the weekends, the guys that we're helping here, on a Sunday and through the week, and they'd come see me at the gate.

Dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, pastor, pastor on the gate. So eventually I said, look, guys, I can't have you here at my front door during the week and at my gate on the weekends.

I also need a break. But I don't do it in like a rough. I don't chase them away. I don't get angry. I say, look, I can't handle both here at the church and you on a Sunday, on a Saturday.

I also need a break. So it's better for you to come here on a Sunday. And, you know, after a few, well, first of all, they actually apologize. They say, oh, you're so sorry. They didn't think about that. I said, no, that's cool. And it takes a few times.

[15:43] You've got to repeat yourself a few times, like the third or fourth time. Then I say, hey, listen. Listen. Remember we spoke about not coming to my gate on the weekend? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

No, flip. You forgot. Okay, well, then just come to me on a Sunday. And then I stick to that. So I don't then give in and I say, no, I don't want you. I can't take it. I can't have it on a Saturday. But I can do it on a Sunday at church. And if you see me on another time, you can come and do that as well. So just communication, but just in a very normal, very straightforward, easy way. Don't speak down. Don't speak rough. Don't chase them away. Have stuff prepared if you can. A loaf of bread with some buttered spread and jam.

Sometimes it's nice to have just a 500 mil, like a, because, you know, you give a mug or a cup. But just have something they can take away. In a little packet, a little 500 mil plastic bottle of water, cool drink, and some sandwiches.

[16:47] I buy the stuff from the shop right here. They've got five, for five rand, you can buy an egg mayo sandwich. And another five rand gets you a hot dog roll. And for 10 bucks.

I often stock it here at the church. So if the guy comes, I go, cool, here's something for you to, something for you to have. Don't be overreactive. So don't have a hard heart.

And this is what James is about. Don't have a hard heart. But also don't have an over-bleeding heart. So that, you know, you run around all frantic because now they must leave the street now. And then I get a phone call, Dylan, there's a guy who must come off the street now. How can you let them stay on the street for another night? Okay. Okay. Now, what exactly are we to do now in that circumstance?

I don't know them. They don't know me. We don't have a safe space for them. So don't be overreactive. Help. But a bleeding heart often gets in the way.

[17:49] So, for example, just think through a little bit. Okay. So here's a guy. Let's say he's been on the streets for some time.

Okay. It's not good for him to be on the streets. Maybe he's not even wanting to leave the streets. Maybe he just wants some food and just needs some clothes or whatever. You'd be surprised.

No, he's not ready to leave the streets yet. Okay. Well, then here's some stuff for you in the meantime. If they've been on the street for weeks or months or years, a few more days isn't going to make a hangover difference.

Yes, it's dangerous. So I'm not saying keep them on the street, but be careful of running around so much that you're stressing yourself out and then you're stressing others out.

Just take measured steps to help them. It's your house. It's your life.

[18:48] It's your time. Draw the boundaries where you need to. But be careful. Don't draw it so much that you're never giving any help. If you find yourself always being too busy or too irritated to help, you need to listen to what God is saying in James.

But if you're always giving and getting irritated and getting sucked in, then you need to practice better personal boundaries.

And we've got our series on boundaries that we did recently. So it's that interplay between help and boundaries. Must you give food?

Must you give money? They typically don't give money because they're going to use it on drugs, but food is going to go to drugs as well. They make a plan to get drugs. But there's no hard and fast rule.

The vouchers is going to be a great system to use, but there's no hard and fast rule. Every now and then, I give money. Like, normally, I just say, look, I've got a policy of not giving money.

[19:49] And I normally stick to that. But you know what? Every now and then, like, this guy just needs something, man. And so give them some money. Yeah. So what?

If they use it for something they're not meant to use it for? You can't help that. But give food. Give food, whatever. Give what you can. But also think more long-term. So there's immediate, and then there's more long-term.

And so the more long-term stuff, one of the great ways is using the U-term vouchers. I think because it moves the conversation from short-term immediate relief to longer-term change.

And so one of the things you want to think through when you're helping someone is what kind of help you're giving. Are you giving relief? Or are you giving development? So we're just going to look at relief versus development for a bit.

So sociologists divide helping the poor into two broad components. There's immediate or emergency relief. Disaster or, yeah, disaster, emergency relief, like helping when the shack is on fire or there's been a flood.

[20:51] And then there's developmental aid. To help build long-term resilience and putting preventative measures in place from being overwhelmed the next time something bad happens to them.

The Bible tells us that that's how God deals with us as well. So here in James, from James chapter 1, he says this. James chapter 1 verse 2.

So God does long-term development with us as well.

In fact, as Brandon was telling his story, you know, this thing where, yes, he's in addiction, yes, he destroyed so many relationships, but did you notice what he said about the recovery?

Yes, part of it is coming off the drugs, but everything else is about relationships. His daughter, his family, he's thinking of himself. And so that's the kind of long-term change.

[22:06] And guys, we're no different from that other than the homes and the drugs, and besides, we spoke about what kind of drugs we use. Legal drugs, there's illegal drugs, and there's legal drugs, okay?

And so, we do the same thing with each other. Oh, I can see that you speak, that's not a nice way to speak to someone. Let me help you speak better.

Oh, that's not a helpful way to think about what's going on. Let me help you with a better way of thinking about that thing. So our growth groups, the stuff that you have from the pulpit, the talking with each other, that's all long-term, it's the same thing.

It's helping getting our brains working properly, getting our eyesight working. What am I seeing?

What's real in front of me? And so God is invested in helping us all grow to maturity.

Like every good parent, He doesn't just give you what you need immediately all the time. You all know as a parent, you've got to say no to the stuff that your kids want, so that they learn to grow up.

[23:10] And God knows that the best driver of growth is letting you sit with a difficult situation for a time so that you grow stronger in and of yourself to handle and overcome other difficulties.

Okay, so, when you're giving help, when the person's standing at your gate or you've formed some kind of relationship with them, you need to ask yourself, what type of help are you giving? There's two types of help.

immediate relief, long-term development. Immediate relief is help, and it's needed, but it's help that helps them stay in the situation.

There's other kinds of help, more long-term help, more development kind of help that helps them change their situation.

That's a very key thing to remember. You need to be able to offer both in a sense. But just remember that there's help that, yes, they need water, they need food, they need whatever, but ongoing, that's going to, if you keep, that's all you're ever doing, you're not going to change the situation.

[24:16] They're going to stay there. So you need to be able to offer more long-term help as well.

At some point in your journey of helping others, you want to push them towards long-term change that helps change their situation, and that's what we do with each other, by the way.

We've all done that. I've needed a little bit of help with my car one day, and I call one of the guys that knows what to do with the car, but over time they're like, yeah, but listen, save up so that you can take it to the mechanic and get the service done so we're not fixing your car every weekend. But it's like that, it's exactly like that with each other. Long-term change that helps change situations, we've got to push towards that. And of course, this can't be done just by you, or even just by me.

Long-term change, development change, developmental kind of change, changing the situation requires more than one person. It's the same with how you raise your kids. It's not just you that raises your kids.

Yes, you're the number one input, but you need extended family, you need friends, you need teachers, you need doctors, you need dentists. It takes a village to raise a child, and the same goes for helping adults who've had their childhood development arrested in some way.

[25:31] And so, just to speak about the vouchers then for a short bit, I'd really like us to use those, the MyChange vouchers. And so, you're going to be able to get them at the kiosk afterwards.

The places where they're selling, Leila, you'll just remind me, but it's at the, is it at the Pick and Pay and Gabriel Road? In the Gabriel Road as well as the P&A.; The P&A; in the Gabriel Road Center and at the NGEN, but P&A; in the Pick and Pay at the Gabriel Road.

But that's the only place you can get vouchers. So, I'm going to speak a bit about how we're going to change that situation. But buy your vouchers there, use them. I use the vouchers, I use them kind of strategically.

I give them to people that I've got a bit of a relationship with. I explain the difference between help that keeps them in a bad situation and help that changes their situation. So, I explain this.

Guys, I can help you short term, but you know that's going to keep you there. You actually need more long term help as well. Yeah, but I just need this for now. No, cool, I'll give you that for now. But I keep on saying, but there's change that's going to keep you where you are and there's change that's going to help you change and I want change that's going to help you change.

[26:40] Otherwise, you're going to get stuck here and you're going to die there. So, the vouchers are a, an absolute great way to help people because it starts that conversation and it gets them to a center that's going to help them.

The other thing you can do, invite them to church, to our soup kitchen. Our soup kitchen is the front door to accessing more long term change because then they come here, we chat with them, we sit with them, we pray with them, they will make an appointment to come see me during the week and then we start that, then there's the hard work that starts.

We start forming that relationship and, oof, man, it's very, very difficult to do that by yourself. But, what we do is, we start doing what we call referrals.

That's basically just looking up where all the shelters are in the city of Cape Town and start making phone calls if they need a shelter. Maybe they just, they might not just need that shelter or a safe space.

I'll explain what the difference is in a minute. But, you, the shelter system is, is, is, there's not enough shelters and they don't, they're not run like bed and breakfast.

[28:02] It's not like booking a hotel where you've got someone just waiting for that phone call and booking you in. You have to phone five times before someone answers the phone. By the sixth time, they say yes, they've got a space. By the time you get there, the space is gone.

It's not easy. It takes, it takes days and days and weeks and weeks and months, sometimes months. I took one person months of phone calls to get them into the right shelter.

That's why I don't have any hair lift. And it's depressing. Like, it's, it's hard. It's hard. It's so frustrating.

you're just about to be able to help the person and you get stuck with phone calls and shelters and things. Then you've got to give them a lift. But then they must meet you to get there, to get the lift. But how do they know when to meet you? They don't have a number. You can't call them and say, hey, I've got a room for you.

They must just happen to pitch up here on a Wednesday that you get hold of the shelter. It's total mix and match. It's only by the grace of God, really, that these guys find a place and get help. What would be helpful is if we had a team of people at St. Mark's that we could sort of call on and say, hey, listen, I've got someone we're trying to help.

[29:16] Can you start making the phone calls for me? Now, I don't think I've, I think I've done it a few times. But that's, yeah, so we'll probably start building some capacity in that regard.

So a little emergency relief team that we could use to make these phone calls. I'm just going to put up the places where there are help in Cape Town. The shelters slash safe spaces.

So a safe space is not, it's a very first level shelter. What do you guys call it? First, very first, not even first phase. It's just a, it's just a, it's a safe space.

It's literally, it's a bed for the, yeah, so it's not long term. Oh, there's a waiting list. If you just Google Cape Town City, Cape Town shelter list, this is what they, this will come up.

It's pretty handy. I've got the list as well. And so, you can also contact me and we can, what I do is I tell the guys just come and see me. I give them my phone. I lock all the doors. But I give them my phone and I say, cool, here's the numbers, just start calling.

[30:19] No, he's never used a phone before. Yes, you've used a phone. Here's how to use a phone. Okay, so giving them agency. You'll make the phone calls. I don't need to make the phone calls. You need to make the phone calls. You can donate clothes to our U-Turn clothing bin.

That goes to the shops. Brandon, you work in the shops? I do. Yeah, so U-Turn sells second hand clothing and the shops is a training center. So U-Turn pays people to go through rehab. They work four days a week and on the fifth day they do all their therapy stuff. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we call it the training day. And you get all that, get your thinking straightened out or get help with that. Guys, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think U-Turn has 300 champions. How many champions have I got? At the moment now we're going to be like 280. 280. So U-Turn employs 280 homeless people. So four days a week they're working, one day of the week they're learning how to change their thinking.

[31 : 30] And they can access that once they've gone through rehab. You have to go through rehab first and then, because we often think, ah, six weeks rehab, you're clean, you can go back, you're fine. But you heard it's not the same like that.

It's the problems that cause the drug problems that you've got to fix. Okay, and then lastly, the last practical thing, join us on our community outreaches.

And so I've got two community outreaches just this month based on the talks that we're doing that you can get involved in, that you can start practicing these, helping others.

And the first one is next weekend on Saturday, the 10th of October. That's at Adam's Farm. So are the Adam's Farm ladies here? No, because Jenny and Jenny's sick at the moment.

So we all know the Adam's Farm ladies that are with us. I think just put up the ad, thanks. So 10th of October, next week Saturday, we're going to sing some songs. Desiree's going to help us with that. Desiree, our pianist.

[32 : 27] We're going to have some yummy treats and we're going to make greeting cards that they can sell at their market in November. So we're going to spend a morning with the ladies at Adam's Farm.

So sign up. Desiree, oh, Swanich is playing. Desiree Goodwin. Desiree, are you Goodwin? Who's there? She's teaching Sunday school.

yeah, I know, yeah. So speak with her or speak to me. Come and join us next week Saturday. Then the second outreach is on the 31st of October.

Now I don't have a slide for that. It took all my skills to make this one with the pink. So I don't have one for that, but you'll get comms on that.

So 31st of October, that's the last Saturday in October. What I want to do is we do one of our community outreaches. We put our U-turn shirts, our U-turn shirts, we put our St. Marks shirts on and we're going to canvas local businesses to stock the MyChange vouchers.

[33 : 25] So the only two is up on Gabriel Road. Let's go to the ShopRite, let's go to the businesses, let's go to Prosper and Spa and go out in little teams and see if they want to sell the vouchers for U-turn.

And we're going to do a, we're going to do a questionnaire to canvas support to see if businesses want to pay for a work scheme that will be run here at St. Marks.

So a work scheme with the guys who, like for example, the guys in the corner here at the park, let's get that park clean. so can the businesses, will they pay us to run a little work scheme and where they, we take one or two guys, we work with them, we give them a day's work and then we help them as well.

We pray with them, we give them some life skills just to change them to see if they can change. And then to partner with U-turn as well. So I'll give you more details about that, but those are two dates, the 10th of October and the 31st of October for us to get involved.

Now remember, our big challenge for the year is to be more involved in God's kingdom by the start of 2027. Remember at the start of 2026, we said, listen, yes, you come to church, you do certain things at church, let's make this year, when you get to the beginning of next year, that you're not in the same space, that you're doing something more.

[34 : 51] And so, get more involved. 2027 is just around the corner. Have you done something new or something different with your Christianity over the course of this year?

The way to help those in need is the same way you help your kids grow. Meet their needs, but also long-term development. The key to this is relationship.

You're going to help others is the same reason you help your kids, because you love them. It's the same reason why we're going to help others, because it's the same reason that God has helped us. It's because He loves us and He can see we're in trouble and He wants to change us.

So, just to close, James 2, verse 8. If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

[35 : 59] Mercy triumphs over judgment. So, friends, Christians are the only people through whom God's mercy can flow. It's mercy that changes everything.

And it's one of the most coolest superpowers that we've got as Christians that only we can show others. And so make sure that you're using it. Let me pray for us. Well, Lord God, we've seen in your word that we're to help the poor, but we're to help them in a certain way, not by looking down on them, but by just treating them like we would anyone else, Lord.

After all, you have made those who are poor rich in the faith. And so, Lord, we all want to be rich and be enriched by you, blessed by you.

We've received your mercy and your blessing, Lord, not just for ourselves, but to have that flow through us to others and so we can change lives as we go along.

Help us to do that. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.

[37 : 48] Amen. Thank you.