

Social Action and the Church (Part 2)

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- [0 : 0 0] Nice to be here with you again. Thank you for your welcome. Thank you for praying for me. He prayed for us who are cold, and I'm cold. I appreciate that.
- Let me pray. Father, I just pray as I bring your word now that you will help me to speak clearly, that you would help me to speak accurately from your word and to apply it in the right way.
- Give me understanding and wisdom and give us ears to hear what you say. Through Paul to the churches, for your sake and for the good of all.
- For Christ's sake, amen. Now, my eldest daughter is a journalist with the Sunday Times, and I was just thinking, what would she say if she came and visited this church for a couple of weeks?
- What would she write about? If she came to where I'm a member at High Community Church, I imagine she would write about the services.
- [1 : 0 5] She'd probably make some comments about the music, knowing her, and maybe she would spot that we lack diversity, although our diversity has grown.
- We're about now 20% diverse, which is great. A few years ago, we were very few. She may be impressed by the children's church. I wonder what she'd say about our connect groups, our home groups.
- But I'm sure whatever she wrote about our church or what she might write about this church would be very different if she went back 2,000 years ago and wrote about the church in Acts.
- Now, we know what the church in Acts is like because Luke has written about that church, and we can read it, about that first church in Jerusalem and just after Pentecost.
- It was a church that gathered daily in the temple and in one another's homes. They listened to the apostles' teachings. They broke bread together, and in their homes, they spent time praying together.
- [2 : 1 6] And Luke says here, they received their food with glad and generous heart. This topic of food comes up quite often. And then he says, Lord, they had all things in common.
- They were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And then we read about a lame beggar being healed and various other things that happened, Peter and John preaching and being put in prison and then being released, and then them praying together.
- And then Luke goes on in chapter 4, and he comments, all those who believed were with one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.
- There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. It lay at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

And then in the next chapter, chapter 6, we see that there is a daily distribution of food to the widows. And then the Greek-speaking widows complained because they were being overlooked in the distribution of food.

[3 : 34] And most of the food was going to the Hebrew-speaking widows, and so they moaned. And so the apostles called the whole church together and said it wasn't right that they should now get involved in sorting out the distribution of food.

There's some injustice, some unfairness there. And so whoever the spokesman, Luke doesn't say who spoke, but let's just assume it was Peter, spoke on behalf of the other apostles.

And he said, look, and this is what he says here, let me just get it. I haven't got the passage here. But he basically said it wasn't right that they should get involved in this business and rather that the congregation should choose seven men full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom and that they should do this job of distributing the food.

Basically, it was a division of labor issue, and it makes sense. Jesus had chosen his disciples. He spent three years with them. He trained them.

You know, it's like an apprenticeship, like going to university. And they spent all this time being qualified to preach the gospel, to evangelize, to plant churches. And here and now, what are they stuck doing?

[4 : 57] There's a problem. Some women are complaining they're not getting food. And it was a justified complaint, and it needed to be sorted out. It wasn't unimportant. But it wasn't the job of the apostles to do that.

And so these seven men, Stephen and others, were chosen, and they then did that particular job. And so what we see here right early on in the church is a distinction between what we call today word ministry and what we call deed ministry.

ministry. And it's a very important distinction. And so what we see here is the beginning of what the church has called the diaconal ministry, the ministry of deacons.

And a deacon comes from the Greek word diakonos, which just means servant, or a minister. And you talk about the prime minister, what it really means, the prime servant, the number one servant in the country.

And I am an ordained minister in the Church of England in South Africa or reach South Africa. That means I'm an ordained servant of the church.

[6 : 06] That's what the word means. Now what is quite interesting here is that whoever the spokesperson for the 12 apostles was, they didn't just say, well, appoint one man to do this job and to sort it out.

They actually appointed seven men. It was a whole group of men to do this job. And that shows the importance of what they were to do. It also means when you have seven people doing, you get less favoritism as well because there's a collective there.

And it was also given to the congregation to choose. It wasn't forced upon them. And so we have a sort of democracy here. And that's very important. If these men are going to serve the congregation, then the congregation should have some say in who they are.

And so they got together and they appointed seven men who were full of the Spirit and full of wisdom. And what's interesting here, the Greek-speaking women were complaining. And so the congregation chose seven men who had Greek names.

And they no doubt were Greek-speaking men. I mean, they still would have been Jews, but Greek-speaking. And so it was a very wise decision. And so this is a...

[7 : 24] And then what the apostles did, the apostles having been chosen by the congregation, and it's important to do that for you to choose your elders or your church council or whatever you have here.

And then Peter and them prayed for them, for this ministry, and they ordained them. They laid hands. It wasn't an ordained to be an elder, but it was ordained or laid on hands to be a deacon.

They were set apart to do this ministry, which also shows they are recognized by the church and that it is an important ministry. And so right from the beginning of Acts, the beginning of the Christian church, you have this division between the eldership or at that stage apostles, elders sort of come later, and then it's the ministry of the word and the ministry of deed.

And we see later on, and we're going to look at 1 Timothy in a little while here, but we see in 1 Timothy, Paul writes about qualifications for being an elder, and the elders had to be godly men, husbands of one wife, they had to be responsible people, and they had to have a gift of teaching.

And then we also see Paul laying down the qualifications for deacon. They also had to be godly men and husbands of one wife, and it probably talks about their wives, it's probably saying that they were also female deacons, there's some dispute about that, it doesn't really matter in terms of this sermon at all, but their qualifications did not include teaching because it was a different thing.

[9 : 11] It doesn't mean to say they couldn't teach if they had gifts of teaching, but to exercise the ministry of the deacon did not require a gift of teaching.

You didn't have to go to George Whitfield College or something like that. You could be an ordinary person, but you had to manage your family well. That was important, and you had to be godly.

All right, so you have basically two orders of ministry right from the very beginning of the Christian church, and that carries on all through the centuries.

What later happened is, and the whole ministry of deacons and looking after the poor and the widows and all that carried on for centuries. It got distorted from the second century on and particularly from about the fourth century onwards, and so we've actually, in our church, we've lost the ministry of deacons, and I'm very pleased to see that Nick is wanting to bring it back, and was calling Dylan Marais to come to the church.

He's going to look after that ministry. It is an important ministry, and when you think of where we are in South Africa, a country with something around about 45% unemployment, the official figure is around 27%, but they never count the people who have stopped looking for work.

[10 : 29] So it's an enormous unemployment, and there's about 55% unemployment with the young people who've left school too. So we have big problems and there's big needs, and so in a country like ours, it's very important to have churches with a thriving diaconal ministry.

Now, last week I spoke about God's concern for widows, orphans, for the poor, and the aliens or the foreigners, and I'm not going to repeat that sermon at all, but what we did see, going right back to the Old Testament, that God was concerned for widows, for the poor, the needy.

He was particularly because those were the people that were overlooked in society. Their husbands had died, or the father had died, or they'd come as immigrants or refugees from another country, and they were in need, and so God laid down specific laws, gleaning laws and other laws that we spoke about last week to help these people so that they were looked after, and we see that in the Gospels as well, and we see it here in the book of Acts and the book of Timothy and other places in the New Testament.

So what I want to do this morning, as I said I would do last time, is not to repeat what I said last week, but to see what is the role of the church in looking after the needy, in looking after the widows, and the destitute, the poor.

Now instead of jumping around all over the New Testament, a bit what I did last week, I'm just going to focus, we've already seen something from Acts chapter 6, the institution of the diaconate, I'm going to just focus on 1 Timothy 5 because it is an important passage, and it's probably the longest passage in the New Testament dealing with this particular problem.

[12 : 22] And just before we turn there, we must remember that the early church loved the widows and the old, and they respected the elderly, very much like African culture, there's respect for the elderly.

In our culture, we've actually lost that respect, and we focus on the youth and the kids, and now there's nothing wrong with looking at them, but there is in the Bible a respect for the elderly, and a concern for the elderly.

And because of that concern, many widows came to Christ because the church loved widows, loved the destitute and the poor, and they came, and they accepted the gospel, and they were converted.

And so what you do have in the early church is a number of widows, and so there was a real need. And so the church had to be very careful that they had the resources to look after these widows.

And so what we find in this passage here is that widows are to be supported, but the support of widows should be restricted.

[13 : 30] It's very clear here. There's not enough money to support hundreds of widows, or even five or ten or twenty widows in a particular, in a small church. I mean, maybe if you've got 500, you have more money, you can support more.

So they have to be very careful about who is supported. So what we're going to do now is ask and answer two questions. The first one is, who is supposed to support widows?

And the second question, who should be supported by the church? So whose responsibility is it to support widows? And if the church has a responsibility, who should be supported?

What are the criteria? What are the qualifications to be enrolled on the supporting list of widows? And that's what we're going to speak about today.

And you will see principles emerge from that, which can be applied to other cases of the ministry of mercy, of helping others. So let's then turn to 1 Timothy 5.

[14 : 35] Now, in the Bible, when a woman got married, her husband was responsible to support her. That goes right back to early chapters in Genesis.

Now, that is still largely true today in most societies. It's less true than then, but it's still largely true today. Because before we had contraceptives, which is comparatively new, coming from the 1950s, so not that long ago.

Some of us were born before that time. So a woman who got married would normally, you know, other things being equal, will have a number of children.

And children take time to be raised, they have to be given food, they have to be taken to school, they have to be helped with homework, and all sorts of things. And that takes up the time of many women, of many mothers.

And so they were often set aside to do that. And their husbands would go out and find work, or be qualified, or be a tradesman, or if you were in a rural area, you would farm and bring in the produce, and you would support your wife and family.

[15 : 46] And so that is, generally speaking, is the husband's job. Okay, we do have more opportunities for women to work and to support themselves now. But that's still the biblical, the basic biblical position, and true in most countries.

And we see that here, in verse 8, Paul writes this, if anyone does not provide for his relatives, especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith, and he's worse than an unbeliever.

Now notice the he there. I noticed that reading. I said, this is interesting, because all the time in verses 4 to 6, about a widow, and it speaks about she, and then she, and she, and then you go back on to verse 9, and to 9 to 16, there's she, she, she, she, she, all the way.

And suddenly here, in verse 8, but if anyone does not provide for his relatives, especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith.

Okay, so it seems to me to be pointed, even if it's a generic he, and includes women, there's an emphasis on the he there. It's the husband's duty, and responsibility, to provide for his wife.

[16 : 59] And that's why Paul later on says here, he talks about the, you know, the younger widows. He said the church shouldn't support the younger widows, those who are under 60, because they can probably find husbands.

He said they should get married, and their husbands support them. It's not the job of the church, to support the younger widows. They must find a husband, and be supported. And so it is the man, the husband's responsibility, to look after his wife.

Now, another thing you'll see, if you look at this passage, and you count them, I counted here, that the word widow, or widows, appears nine times.

That's a lot. Nine times. I mean, there are many Bible words, that aren't even nine times in the whole Bible. Let it know nine times, in 14 verses here.

You find that. Now, what does that mean? Nine times. It means that the husband has died. That's what it means. A widow is someone whose husband has died, and that's why she's in need.

[18 : 03] And if he is the provider, and he dies, provider is gone. And so she is in need, and someone else has to support it, or in our society, you could probably go out and work.

But in those societies, it was very difficult to do that. And so, just taking this to today, we've said the husband is to provide for his wife.

So what happens? You're going to die. And often, and in most cases, women outlive us. Okay? And so we need to provide for our wives.

Now, in those days, you know, the family and others had to get together, and help support. But we also have something, that they didn't have here. We have life cover.

We have life assurance. And I'll just mention this, because this is an area, that the church has neglected. I've never heard, once, in all my time in South Africa, anyone talking about life cover, and the responsibilities of husbands.

[19 : 04] I've heard stories of those, who haven't done it. We had someone in our home group, whose husband wasn't a Christian, and did not have life cover for his wife. And she took out life cover, and he cancelled it.

And he died. Young. And she was destitute. It was a tragedy. I've heard other stories, of godly men, who said, oh, well, God will provide.

But God provides by means. He provides by husbands, who are responsible, and take out life cover. Now, you can't always do it, in all societies, and some people are poor.

But in a church like this, this is something that husbands, we need to provide that cover, if we are able to, and save, so that our wives will not be destitute, so that St. Paul's will not be bankrupted, by supporting widows, and then no money for the minister, or anything like that.

Okay, so, the husband's job, to look after his wife, and to provide for her. But that's not the only one here, that Paul mentions. He says, if a widow has children, or grandchildren, let them learn to show godliness, to their own household, and to make some return, to their parents, for this is pleasing, in the sight of God.

[20 : 24] So, the next person, who has responsibility, is, are the children. Children are to provide, for their parents. When we are parents, and have young children, we provide, for our children.

But in our old age, and we should obviously, save up, for our old age, and pension, and things like that, if we're able to. But the children, have a responsibility. Even the grandchildren, have a responsibility, says Paul here, and this is the word of God.

And why should they do this? And Paul says here, to make some return, to their parents. Your parents have brought you up. It's now our turn, to take over.

And we've had to do that, in our family, with my wife's parents, and look after them. And also said, this is pleasing to God. This has been godly, as a Christian.

And then again, he repeats that, whole thing about, we've got to provide, for our parents, and relatives. So being a Christian, is not only about, going to Bible studies, and singing, and rah, rah, rah, and all that, which is important.

[21 : 36] We do that. We go to church. But being a Christian, living a Christian life, means being responsible, to parents, responsible for our children, for many practical things.

It's not an airy, fairy life. God has made us, physical beings, with relatives, with family, and we are to look after them. And then there's, another person, verse 16 here, it says, if any believing woman, has relatives, who are widows, let her care for them.

Let the church, not be burdened, so that it may, care for those, who are really widows, or widows in need, the NIV says. Okay, so believing women, have a responsibility, to look after widows, in her family.

And the word family here, is the extended family, because there's a contrast, in the passage, between the family, or the relatives, in some translations, and their own household.

So it goes beyond, it may be a brother-in-law, or a sister-in-law's mother, or something like that. So a Christian woman, needs to look after the widows, in her family.

[22 : 46] Then Paul comes, to the place here. Now if a widow, has no family, he says in verse 5 there, if she who is truly a widow, left all alone.

Okay, so these are the people, that Paul's going to see. They are the widows, who need to be supported. They're all alone, they have no family, they have no husband. And they are destitute, because their husband has died, and they didn't have life cover, in those days.

And, then he talks about here. So the church has, so in those cases, the church has a responsibility, to look after those widows.

But even that, has conditions. And we're going to look at that, in the next point here. There are qualifying criteria, for the church, to look after those widows, who are destitute, who have no family, to look after them at all.

And the reason, for that restriction, is, well there are several reasons. Because the church, cannot support all. This is a duty of the church. Okay. This is a responsibility, of the church.

[24 : 00] Not only to pay, the minister, or the ministers, and the staff here, but also to support widows. And so, the church has to be, very careful, to be wise, in its financial stewardship.

Yeah. And, and Paul says, right at the end, of the passage here, let the church, not be burdened, so that it's care for those, so it may care for those, who are really widows.

Okay. That's, responsibility, good stewardship. This is a, a task, that the church has to do. And the church, our church, is that I don't think, does do.

But it's part, and one of the reasons, because we don't have a diaconate, in the church of England. And that's a real problem. Okay. Okay.

So, so there are, restrictions here. Okay. But that is the job, of the church. And, and we mustn't, also mustn't think, it's not the job of the state.

[25 : 08] The state has enough expenses, of its own, and can't even, sort out the electricity, and things like that. Okay. It's not the job, of the state, to provide, for pensions, and all that sort of thing, and for look after the old.

That is our job, as parents, as fathers, husbands, and families, and the church, to do, to look after. Okay. So that's, that's the first, point there.

Who's responsible? Okay. Husbands, children, families, believing widows, or believing, women in the church, and then finally, the church, itself.

Now the question is, the church has a responsibility, to look after widows. Okay. But, which widows, must it look after? And Paul says here, we to support, widows, who are truly widows, in the ESV version, or widows really in need, okay, in the NIV, and he says, those are, with, those are the women, without families, okay, without, they're all alone.

So that's the first, criteria. They don't have families, to support them. The second, criteria here, is that they're Christians, because the church, doesn't have money, to support all the, non-Christian widows, out there.

[26 : 35] It's enough, to support Christian widows, but it says here, she who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope, on God, and continues, in supplications, and prayers, night and day.

Okay. So it's a Christian widow, and it's a widow, too, who is praying, who has a ministry, a prayer. Now, I'm not sure, that Paul is saying, it's only, if you have that ministry, and you pray night and day, and you're relying on God.

I would think, in the general tenor here, that it's, you know, if you're involved, in some other ministry, and maybe those women, were doing that, because they were immobile, and they didn't have cars, in those days, or anything like that, and so they, they were restricted.

Okay. But I mean, you may now, be in a position, where you're a widow, and you, you do, you can drive, or you do have a car, or you are able, to make food, or someone pick it up, from the church, and you, maybe other ministries, but basically, you're Christian, and you're serving, in the church, in some way, with whatever capacity, you do have.

They have that ministry. And then Paul says, these widows, are to be enrolled. The church has got to be organized. It's not just happy, scrappy, or anything like that.

[27 : 51] You're organized. Okay. And there's a role, there's a list, and these are the women, that qualify. And to be on the list, Paul says, he's already spoken about, they've got to be alone, they haven't got family, to support them, and they are Christian women, and godly women, and serving in the church.

He says, they must be over 60, because after that age, they're not likely, to find a husband. I mean, you do sometimes, and you're fortunate, but not likely, and especially in those days.

And it's also, in those days, the start of old age, from 60 onwards. Now we live a bit longer, maybe we can push the age up a bit. There. All right.

And being the wife of one husband, this is really puzzling, because later on, he says, you know, the younger widows, must get married again. So, everyone's a bit puzzled, about Paul's, what's said there, the NIV changes, the literal translation, those who have been faithful, in marriage, which is great, although that's not, the literal translation.

And then it says here, and this is particularly, important here, she has to have, a reputation, for good works, if she has brought up children.

[29 : 08] Okay, this is the good works, bringing up children. That is a good work, the Bible says. Okay. Bringing up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted.

Okay. Now those are important, shown hospitality. So, when she's been, younger, and, and she's had a husband, and bringing up kids, she has shown, a life of hospitality, caring for others.

She's now old. Okay. And if she expects to be, to be cared for by the church, when she's old, she's, should have shown, this hospitality, this care, herself.

And not lived, a self-indulgent, life at all. And it goes on, Paul goes on, and says here, cared for the afflicted, washed the feet of the saints, humble service.

It probably was literally that, but, but, but it's not primarily that, at all. I mean, it's, it's talking about humble service. So a woman who, has lived a godly life, bringing up her own children, showing hospitality to others, in the community, and in the church, has served, has been humble.

[30 : 27] Those are the women, who qualify, to be supported by the church. It's, you know, and then Paul sums it up here, and he says here, you know, he has devoted herself, to every good work.

It's those people, who qualify. And that restricts, the church. And it makes it, that is good stewardship, and the church can manage that.

And then Paul, I'm not going to go into, but he also says, who should not be cared for, supported by the church, the younger widows, widows, who go around gossiping, and being busybodies, around the thing, and being idle.

They should not be, cared for by the church. They should rather get married, and have more children, and look after their children, and be good mothers, and do that.

And then, maybe when they get older, the church can support them. So what we see here, is there is discernment. Okay.

[31 : 42] The church has limited resources. Okay. Cannot help everybody. Okay. So who do we help? And we help those who, don't have family.

Okay. And who have been, members of the church, and Christians, and have, lived selfless lives, supporting others, showing hospitality, bringing up the kids, and all that.

And so there's a distinction here, between what we call, the deserving poor, or deserving widows, and the undeserving. Now that's not a distinction, that the world likes to make, at all. Now there's a sense, in which, we don't like that distinction, because, we are all undeserving sinners, and God has mercy upon us, and grace, to undeserving sin.

But this is not a case, of deserving, or undeserving, no one deserves salvation, at all. This is a case, of finance, of finite resources.

Okay. And when it comes, to finite resources, we exercise, good stewardship. And we do make, a distinction, between the deserving widows, and the undeserving widows.

[32 : 55] Paul doesn't use, that language. But he's setting, our criteria, there. And so we do have, to be good stewards, of what we, of what we possess.

Now let me just, come to a conclusion here. Now I, I spoke about, deacons, in the beginning, of the sermon. Now if you read, this passage here, in 1 Timothy 5, it says nothing, about deacons.

Okay. But if you go back, just you know, a couple, you know, a couple of paragraphs, back to, to the middle, of chapter 3, you see a whole section, about deacons.

Who should be, the qualification, of deacons. Okay. And if you go back, to Acts chapter 6, you see, the need of widows, there again, being fed.

And what, and the response, of Peter and the apostles is, well if they're, going to be looked after, we've got to have, a body of people, looking after them. And they call them, and they establish, that body, which the church, later calls deacons, just meaning, servants or ministers.

[34 : 03] So it makes sense, to make this link, between deacons, and widows. Deacons, and meeting, the needs of, you know, needs of whatever, they may be, aliens or children, orphans and things like that.

And that's exactly, what happens here, and that's exactly, what the early church did. So the ministry of deacons, historically, was a ministry, of mercy, for the poor.

And the poor, would have included widows, would have included, the fatherless, the orphans, would have included, immigrants and refugees, and other people, who, you know, weren't able, to support them, themselves at all.

And so, because the ministry, of mercy, is important, and it is important, because if you have, a body of men, who are, basically set aside, and qualified, and ordained, to do that, that shows, it's important.

But it also shows, that there's a distinction, between that, and the ministry, of preaching, and teaching, and evangelism. They're both important, and they're done, by different people.

[35 : 09] But they both, need to be done. We, in the Church of England, in South Africa, or reached South Africa, have focused, on the one. We've got deacons, but the deacons, our deacons, are happy ministers.

Okay, you get ordained, a deacon, for one or two years, and then you become, a presbyter. Now, that was not, the case, here, in the book, of Acts, or 1 Timothy.

These men, and perhaps women, as well, were set aside, to do this ministry, of helping, the poor, and the needy, and the widows, and the orphans, and so on.

And I think, we need to get back to that, because as I've said, we live in a country, of tremendous need, tremendous poverty, you know, we're the rich here, even though you may not think, you're rich compared, to Constantin, or Bishop's Court.

We are comparatively, wealthy. Most of us have jobs, we have decent clothes, we've gone to, reasonable schools, but we're not unemployed, most of us.

[36 : 14] But there's tremendous need, and there's need, in our communities too, and maybe in our families, and things. And so, this ministry, needs to be, pursued.

And I'm really pleased, that Nick is doing that, and calling Dylan here, to help them. It's a tremendous step forward. And you guys, hopefully, can be an example, to the whole domination, of coming back, to the biblical ministry, of deacons.

And I think, that's pretty well, all that I want to, to save here, to say here. And just to, to finalize here, this ministry, these people are called deacons, they, it's an office, there are criteria for them, and so they are recognized, and they set aside here, in the Bible.

Okay. And that's important, because if you don't have this, if you don't have, to do the formalities, we are, in our denomination, we don't like, too many structures, and too many rules, or anything like that.

But, but the Bible is quite clear here, that it is, it is a distinct ministry, you can be ordained, or if you don't like that word, you set aside for it, there's official recognition, there are qualifications, for it.

[37 : 45] And when you do actually have, such a body, as deacons, then, the work gets done. If you have no committee, or no group of deacons, things don't happen.

And if you only have one person, in charge, you know, one person doesn't talk to himself, all the time. You don't get so far either, you need more people, and so the apostles, set aside seven people, for the church in Jerusalem.

Seven is not a magic number, you can have five, you can have 20, depends on the size of your church, or something. But you need to do that. And so when Dylan comes, he needs a committee, or a group, or others as well, to do it.

And then you can exercise this ministry. And if the church does that, and this is where I want to end up here, it is a tremendous witness to the world.

The world doesn't always understand, our gospel preaching and things. But when they see that we love one another, that we care for the widows, we care for refugees, people from Zimbabwe, or Congo, or somebody come here, and they're destitute, and the church cares for them.

[38 : 51] It opens their eyes. And the early church did this. I mean, one of the things they did, is that every morning, they would go out and rescue the babies, abandoned under the bridges. And they would take these kids in, and adopt these children.

And they would grow up as Christians, and the church grew. And another thing the early church did, is when there were plagues, and there were several plagues in the first few centuries, and the non-Christians, what they did, is they took the family member who had the plague, and they threw them on the street.

And they didn't feed them or anything. And the Christians came, and washed these people. And many Christians died from ministering to these people. They washed them, they fed them, they gave them to drink, and many of these people recovered.

And the church grew. And the early church gave recognition for women, and elevated women.

And the church grew. And so their sort of so-called social ministry of support, was a tremendous evangelistic tool. It wasn't done for the purpose of evangelism. It was done because they loved, they showed the love of God, to these people in need.

[40 : 00] And the world saw it. And the church grew. And I submit, if we pursue this in our denomination, and show greater love and care for those who are in need, others will see it, and be attracted to the church.

And it will have an evangelistic spin-off. We don't do it to get scalps. We do it because we love God, and we love people. But there will be a bonus, and that the church will grow, and your church will grow.

And I leave that with you. Let's pray. Father, I just thank you for the example of Paul and the early church, the apostles, for the ministry of caring for the needy, for the widows, for the fatherless, for showing love in various ways.

Lord, help us to love others. Help us to expend ourselves. Christ died for us and served us. Help us to reach out to the poor and the needy and the widows.

And I just pray for Nick and Dylan and Naomi and others in leadership in this church. Bless their ministry. Give them great wisdom. Pour out your spirit on this church, Lord.

[41 : 16] We just pray, Lord, that this church will continue to grow and be a beacon of light and a beacon of hope in this community for Christ's sake and for his glory and the expansion of his kingdom.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.