

HOW TO NEIGHBOR

CONNECT *BREAK THE ICE AND GET PEOPLE TALKING*

- Growing up, if you got some money, what did you tend to spend it on?
- How would you define poverty in one sentence?
- Would you describe yourself as rich or poor? Why?

TRUTH *UNDERSTAND AND DISCUSS THE SCRIPTURE'S MEANING*

In America, we tend to define poverty as a lack of material possessions. But a quick glance at poverty research – like surveys from The World Bank – shows that poverty brings on feelings of shame, worthlessness, fear, humiliation, and hopelessness. If followers of Jesus are going to be great neighbors, loving the poor well provides an amazing opportunity to do just that. So the question is, how? Let's look at the words of Jesus to guide us.

WE'RE POORER THAN WE THINK

READ: Luke 4:16-19

DISCUSS: How do verses 18-19 help you understand the mission of Jesus?

This announcement of Jesus's mission is a quote from Isaiah 61. The poor in Isaiah's original context were Israelites who'd been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon. Israel's poverty at that time pointed to a far greater poverty – their separation from God because of their rebellion against him. Without Jesus, all people are separated from God, so we've all shared this deep poverty. When Jesus said he came to preach the good news to the poor, he meant all of us. We're only ready to truly empower the poor when we see our shared poverty – that we all need Jesus to heal our shame, our hopelessness, and our slavery to sin.

SERVING, NOT SAVING

READ: Matthew 25:34-40

DISCUSS: Why do you think Jesus wants us to meet physical needs, not just spiritual needs?

Jesus's goal is to reconcile people to God, but that doesn't mean he isn't interested in meeting people's physical needs. Quite the opposite. During his ministry, Jesus met people's physical needs *and* pointed to their greater need for salvation. Preaching the gospel and serving the needs of others go hand in hand. Those who are struggling aren't projects we help – they are people we love. Many of us first came to Jesus to meet a pressing

need in life, and we then found him as Savior. Now we must both proclaim the gospel and find out how to serve those in need.

GRACE *SEE HOW THE PASSAGE CONNECTS TO JESUS*

THE ONE WHO BECAME POOR

READ: 2 Corinthians 8:9-14

DISCUSS: In what ways did Jesus become poor for us?

When Paul was encouraging the Corinthian disciples to be generous and to serve others, he pointed to Jesus. Yes, loving our poor neighbors well is costly. Loving anybody well is costly. And yet we are recipients of God's costly love. Empowering the poor isn't a burden; it's an opportunity to love others the way we've been loved by God through Jesus Christ.

CHANGE *APPLY THE PASSAGE TO OUR THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND ACTIONS*

- Are there some wrong ways you've viewed the poor in the past that have been challenged by this discussion?
- What does it mean to see the poor as God sees them?
- What are some opportunities you see in your life for empowering the poor?

PRAYER *RESPOND TO THE PASSAGE IN PRAYER*

- God tells us to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you" (Jer 29:7). Pray for poverty to be lifted in our city – for jobs, for effective programs, for opportunities, for empowering.
- Pray for Jesus-like compassion for the poor and wisdom to see and take opportunities to serve the poor.

DISCIPLESHIP CHECK-IN

- Have you read your Bible consistently the past week?
- Who is someone you're praying to share Jesus with this week, and what's one way you can love them well?