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POVERTY & GIVING



Aim

- To develop a tendency of giving without discrimination
- To teach the appropriate way to give
- To make students aware of the various blessings acquired through giving

Spiritual Preparation for Servants

- Read those references below and reflect on how they relate to your current living. Make weekly vows in order to strengthen this aspect of the spiritual life.

Resources

- The Bible- Various references noted throughout the lesson plan
- Anba Abraam: Friend of the Poor. By Father Tadros Y. Malaty.
Especially Chapter 2, pg 9 onwards
- The Spiritual Means. By His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.
Especially chapter 10, pg 131 onwards
- Sublimity of Monasticism. By H.G. Anba Mettaous.
Especially chapter 24, pg 298 onwards
- Our Love for Our Poor Brethren. By Father Tadros Y. Malaty.
The Garden of the Monks

Contents

- Activities
- The lesson plan is broken up into WHO, HOW and WHY giving to those in poverty is a necessity as a Christian
- Background Readings for the Servants
 - Numerous facts about worldwide poverty
 - Bible references regarding poverty

- Is the Bible condemning wealth
- Relevant short story and poem on this topic

Activities

- Start by asking the students to recall events throughout the Bible in which Jesus emphasised the importance of giving to those in need.
- Ask the class to clarify whether people in need are only those who lack material possessions or can those in need present in other forms (e.g. Physically ill, those being persecuted etc) and whether or no the bible condemning wealthy Christians.
- Get each student to list one thing or aspect of there life that they consider to be a blessing from God (e.g. academic excellence, sporting talent, wealth etc.)
- Discuss the concept of giving tithes with the students
- While going through the lesson with the class, prompt the students to contribute any events/ stories from the Bible or of Church Fathers and Saints which are examples of each point being made.
- Other Options:
 - Encourage contribution to a charity

This may be done by getting the students to either give a little bit of money to the church each week or even contributing supplies to “Feeding the Homeless” organized by our Church eg. St Paul’s Mission based at St Mary’s Cathedral. Another option is to have a representative from a certain charity come give the students a short talk on that charity and its achievements.

- Unequal Distribution of Snacks

Distribute bags of snacks—one to each child. The bags have been filled unevenly so that some children get a large portion, some a medium amount and some a very small amount. Discuss how each child feels upon comparing his portion to the others. Leads to a discussion of what is just.

- Hunger Banquet

At a meal time, set up a large room as follows: one or two tables with tablecloths and a three course filling meal including dessert; a few more tables without tablecloths with soup, bread and juice; a large open space with one table (no chairs) with just water and bread. As people enter the room, hand each one a ticket randomly—one color will allow them to eat at the first world meal, a

different color will send them to the second world meal and a third color will send them to the third world meal. About 15% of the tickets should be for the first world meal, about 25% for the second world meal and about 60% for the third world meal. Discuss participants' feelings following the meal. Most suitable for high school students.

- Video/ Presentation

It's impossible to be unaware of the persistence of poverty in the world. Haunting images of poverty are brought to our attention on a regular basis. It might be the newspaper or TV bringing news of famine in Africa, or an overseas aid organisation trying to squeeze more dollars out of a reluctant public. Most of us go through an entire gamut of reactions when confronted by such images and information. Pity, annoyance, resistance, despair, frustration – are just some of them.

Allow the students to watch a video of world-wide poverty then bring it to the local level or even a video clip following homeless man on the street clip on – 'how did he end up in that situation? (these may be acquired from the red cross, world vision etc.

Think of a recent time when you have been confronted by such images.

- Describe the image and your reaction/s to it.
- How do you feel about those reactions?
- What action did you take in response?

Lesson

a) Christianity does NOT discriminate. (WHO)

- Anyone who needs my love, mercy and kindness is my brother regardless of race, religion or social class. Subsequently it is our responsibility to acknowledge this and strive to assist all those in poverty, not just those from our primary, "favored" community.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3 :28).

- Example:

Throughout the Bible, it is evident that the Lord Jesus displayed love towards the poor and did not discriminate between different races, religions or languages.

- It is He who met the Samaritan woman and talked to her about His wonderful salvation. Luke 10:29-37
- Anba Abraam: Once in an "*agapi banquet*" (the "banquet of love"), which the bishopric held for the people, the cook made a table of fried fish for the rich, and another table of cooked fish for the poor. When the bishop entered to have his dinner with them, he saw the two tables, and he firmly ordered the cook to mix the two kinds of fish. He said, "Who wants to eat from the mixture, let him eat, for God does not separate the poor from the rich, all are the same to Him." When his brethren, the "poor" heard this, they rejoiced for his real fatherhood. The rich, moved by his love for his children and his high degree of spirituality, also ate from the mixture.

b) How should we as Christians give? (HOW)

i. Give as a Brother (sharing the experience as if of one body)

- The Christian way is to share in the tribulations of those in poverty. Hence we must share in the feelings, sorrows and sufferings as members of one body.

"Our teacher St. Paul says: "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill - treated, since you also are in the body"
(Hebrews 13:3).

-Example:

- *“Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard” (Prov 21:13)*
- St John the Merciful who sold everything and gave to the poor. Then when there was nothing else to sell, he sold himself as a slave and gave the money paid for him to the poor. St Serapion also gave his tunic to a poor man who was naked, then sold his Bible also and gave the price to the poor . When his disciple asked him about that, he answered him saying: “The Bible said to me go and sell all you have and give the poor. So I sold it, as there was nothing else in my possession.”

ii. Give with love and generosity

- Almsgiving devoid of inner love is rejected. Hence the desire to give generously and extend love to our brethren is an essential part of the giving process. Without this, or with ulterior motive, our almsgiving is discarded by God

“If I give away all I have... but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3)

- Example:

- When Ananias and Sapphira gave a part of the price of the field to the apostles and kept a part for themselves, St. Peter the apostle refused to accept their offering.
- His Holiness Pope Shenouda III said, “You love the one who is in need and urged by this love, you give him. Your love shows in your treatment when you give. The needy would feel your love and that would make him more joyful than his joy with what he took. He takes from you feelings before he takes material things. And he would feel that your giving is not a type of formality but a sentiment and contribution. You too when you give him would not be less joyful, like the mother who rejoices when she gives to her son, a joy that precedes the giving, and accompanies it because of her son’s joy.”

iii. Give in secret

- Give to the needy in humility and do not boast about all that you have given/done. John Chrysostom says; "If you reveal your alms, the devil steals them from you as the Pharisee did". This also includes keeping your good deeds secret from yourself, i.e. do not count or check on how much you have given.

- Example:

- "Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:2-4).
- His Holiness Pope Shenouda III wrote in regard to the following passage, "*Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing*" (Mt 6:3). Do not mention how much you have given and do not recall how much you have given. Do not count your gifts but try to forget them all, lest the devil of vain glory fights you with that and also lest you receive your rewards on earth by glorifying yourself.

c) Why should we as Christians give/ The Blessings of almsgiving? (WHY)

i. It makes us like God in His Mercy

Its effectiveness qualifies almsgivers to be like God in His mercy and the Lord says; "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful".

"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." (1 Peter 2:21)

ii. Delivers us from Judgement

That who does not show mercy does not deserve mercy... and the church says in the Agpia prayers that there is no mercy on the Day of Judgment for those who were merciless on earth (Vigils/Midnight prayer).

iii. Allows us to attain Heavenly treasures

- Through giving to those in poverty in the correct fashion, we are able to acquire Heavenly treasures. This is evident many times in the Bible and through many example.

- Example:

- Pope John II, Patriarch of Alexandria and known as "the Merciful Pope", told us about the story of Peter the Miser. A poor man begged him to give him something and Peter threw a loaf at his face. Two days later Peter fell ill and he saw in a dream that he was dead and that he was brought before the Lord

to be judged. The demons argued that Peter was theirs but the angel found that Peter did one good thing in his life and that was the loaf he had thrown to the beggar so he said to Peter, "Because of this loaf the Lord gives you a chance to repent and He postponed your day of death so repent and give alms". Peter's life changed completely and he began to give some of his clothes to the church to give them to the needy. In a vision he saw the Lord putting on the clothes Peter gave the poor so he rejoiced, as he knew that Christ received his alms and kept them for him as heavenly treasure.

- His Holiness Pope Shenouda III wrote: "With the same liberality in giving, so God treats us... And so He said: "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be put into your bosom" (Lk 6:38). And also: "*Bring all the tithes into the storehouse... and prove me now in this,*" Says the Lord of hosts: "*If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it...*" (Mal 3:10). It was also said: "*Honour the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine*" (Prov 3:9).

Background reading for the servant:

General Facts About Poverty Today

<http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Facts.asp>



- . Half the world — nearly three billion people — live on less than two dollars a day.
- . The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the poorest 48 nations (i.e. a quarter of the world's countries) is less than the wealth of the world's three richest people combined.
- . Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names.
- . Less than one per cent of what the world spent every year on weapons was needed to put every child into school by the year 2000 and yet it didn't happen.
- . 1 billion children live in poverty (1 in 2 children in the world). 640 million live without adequate shelter, 400 million have no access to safe water, 270 million have no access to health services. 10.6 million died in 2003 before they reached the age of 5.

Number of children in the world	2.2 billion
Number in poverty	1 billion (every second child)
Children out of education worldwide	121 million

For the 1.9 billion children from the developing world, there are:

- . 640 million without adequate shelter (1 in 3)
- . 400 million with no access to safe water (1 in 5)
- . 270 million with no access to health services (1 in 7)

Survival for children Worldwide,

- 0. 10.6 million died in 2003 before they reached the age of 5 (same as children population in France, Germany, Greece and Italy)
- . 1.4 million die each year from lack of access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation

Health of children Worldwide,

- . 2.2 million children die each year because they are not immunized
- . 15 million children orphaned due to HIV/AIDS (similar to the total children population in Germany or United Kingdom)

Consider the global priorities in spending in 1998:

Global Priority	\$U.S. Billions
Cosmetics in the United States	8
Ice cream in Europe	11
Perfumes in Europe and the United States	12
Pet foods in Europe and the United States	17
Business entertainment in Japan	35
Cigarettes in Europe	50
Alcoholic drinks in Europe	105
Narcotics drugs in the world	400
Military spending in the world	780

And compare that to what was estimated as *additional* costs to achieve universal access to basic social services in all developing countries:

Global Priority	\$U.S. Billions
Basic education for all	6
Water and sanitation for all	9
Reproductive health for all women	12
Basic health and nutrition	13

Poverty In the Bible:

Old Testament:

The Hebrew language has several terms for the poor and there are at least six different ones with a range of meanings, including:

- (a) *Dal*: the low, weak, downtrodden, lean, thin;
- (b) *Ani*: afflicted, oppressed, wretched, bowed down, downtrodden; (c) *Muk*: low, oppressed;
- (d) *Ebyon*: wanting, needy, deprived;
- (e) *Yarash*: dispossessed; and
- (f) *Rush*: destitute. All imply material poverty based on socio-economic conditions; most suggest suffering and exploitation at the hands of the rich, the greedy and the insensitive.

God's remedy for these breaches in community included:

1. _ The law of release by which debts are to be cancelled every seven years (see Dt. 15:1)
2. _ A prohibition of interest on loans to other Israelites and regulations about collateral (see Ex. 22:25-27 and Dt. 23:19)
3. _ Charity to the poor is emphasized (see Prov. 14:31; Amos 5:12)
4. _ The poor had first rights to the sabbatical fruits (see Ex. 23:11; Lev. 25:6)
5. _ The tithe of the third years harvest was for the benefit of the poor and needy (see Dt. 14:28-29 and 26:14).
6. _ The poor could pluck from the vineyard or grain fields enough to eat, but could not gather more than one could eat at that time (see Lev. 19:9, Dt. 23:25, Lk. 6:1)
7. _ The poor were allowed to present less expensive offerings at the Temple (see Lev. 12:8, 14:21, 27:8; and Lk. 2:24)
8. _ The Jubilee, the 50th year occurring at the end of seven sabbatical cycles of seven years when all land is returned to its ancestral owners and all Israelite slaves are liberated (see Lev. 25:8-17, 23-55 and Num. 36:4)

New Testament:

In Jesus' time the Jewish people believed riches proved that a man or woman was pleasing to God and poverty/begging the reverse.

The true riches are in the practice of pleasing God, for instance by helping others in need and not being selfish "Be careful and guard against all kinds of greed.

Life is not measured by how much one owns." Luke chapter 12 verse 15. "The love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 10. KJV.

In the New Testament, the church also had a role in helping to meet the needs of the poor. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul talks about a collection that was sent from the churches to the Jerusalem believers. We also find many scriptural admonitions calling for Christians to distribute their resources to others compassionately (2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Tim. 5:9-10; 6:18; James 1:27).

Is the Bible condemning wealthy Christians?

Our materialistic culture is seducing Christians into an economic lifestyle that does not glorify God. The popularity of television programs such as "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" and the veneration of social groups such as the glamorous "yuppies" testify to our society's materialistic values, values that many Christians have adopted.

At first glance, the Bible seems to teach that wealth is wrong for Christians. It appears even to condemn the wealthy. After all, both Jesus and the Old Testament prophets preached against materialism and seemed to say at times that true believers cannot possess wealth. If this is so, then all of us in Western society are in trouble, because we are all wealthy by New Testament standards.

But a comprehensive look at the relevant biblical passages quickly reveals that a biblical view of wealth is more complex. In fact, Scripture teaches three basic principles about wealth.

- First, wealth itself is not condemned. For example, we read in Genesis 13:2 that Abraham had great wealth. In Job 42:10 we see that God once again blessed Job with material possessions. In Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, wealth is seen as evidence of God's blessing (Deut. 8; 28; Prov. 22:2; Eccles. 5:19).

But even though wealth might be an evidence of God's blessing, believers are not to trust in it. Proverbs, Jeremiah, 1 Timothy, and James all teach that the believer should not trust in wealth but in God (Prov. 11:4; 11:28; Jer. 9:23; 1 Tim. 6:17; James 1:11; 5:2).

- Second, when wealthy people in the Bible were condemned, they were condemned for the means by which their riches were obtained, not for the riches themselves. The Old Testament prophet Amos railed against the injustice of obtaining wealth through oppression or fraud (4:11; 5:11). Micah spoke out against the unjust scales and light weights with which

Israel defrauded the poor (6:1). Neither Amos nor Micah condemned wealth *per se*; they only denounced the unjust means by which it is sometimes achieved.

- Third, Christians should be concerned about the effect wealth can have on our lives. We read in Proverbs 30:8-9 and Hosea 13:6 that wealth often tempts us to forget about God. Wealthy believers may no longer look to God for their provision because they can meet their basic needs. We read in Ecclesiastes 2 and 5 that people who are wealthy cannot really enjoy their wealth. Even billionaires often reflect on the fact that they cannot really enjoy the wealth that they have. Moreover, Proverbs 28:11 and Jeremiah 9:23 warn that wealth often leads to pride and arrogance.

So the Bible does not condemn those who are wealthy. But it does warn us that if God blesses us with wealth, we must keep our priorities straight and guard against the seductive effects of wealth.

Ian's Story

We knocked at the door of one of the very shabby cottages in Sarata. It was New Years Day 1996 and I was in this little, remote, village in Romania with a small group of English Christians and a large, lively, group of Romanian Christian teenagers.

As I stood there with one of the teenagers holding a box of food we heard shuffling behind us as an elderly man appeared from a ramshackle barn. He let us into his ice cold house and almost wept as we gave him the food. He then explained that he could not afford to heat even one room of his house, which is all most of his neighbours could afford. During the winter months he lived in the barn where the warmth from his animals was all that let him survive the bitter cold. The food we gave him meant he could spend the money he would have used for food to buy wood so that he could live in his house for a while.

This visit to Sarata was my first encounter with real poverty. When you see poverty and suffering on the TV news you know that in 5 minutes there will be something much less unpleasant to watch. Seeing these people face to face was a much more challenging experience. I will always remember the warmth of their welcome. I will never forget the smell of strange food and of large families cooped up in one room all winter. What affected me most, though, was the knowledge that they would probably be living in these appalling conditions for the

rest of their lives. I knew I would soon be on a plane back to my comfortable home and could just forget my few days in Romania.

It wasn't quite that simple though. Jesus says "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (The Bible, Matthew chapter 19 verse 21). I realised I am not perfect and although I should want to be perfect I could not obey Jesus' command. Of course I never said it to myself like that. It was more like "It's not as if I have an extravagant lifestyle, and if I did sell it all it wouldn't make much money, and I have a responsibility to my family, it would be wrong to make them suffer, and...". At the time they didn't seem like excuses and as my memory of Sarata gradually fades I feel less uncomfortable about having a roomy house with all the luxuries we take for granted.

BUT.....my time in Sarata has made a difference. I spend a lot of my time organising food collections for Romania and Moldova (an even poorer neighbouring country). Last February I went to a Christian concert where God used my memories of Sarata and the words of the singer to challenge me about my priorities in life. As a result I have moved to a house nearer my church so that I can become much more involved in the Sunday School work, the maintenance of the church building, and in the life of the church as it works to make a difference in the community.

Did my encounter with the poverty in Sarata change my life? Yes.

Did it change my life completely? No.

Did it change it as much as God wanted it to? Probably not.

However, it has made me a better and more active Christian and made me much more grateful for the luxuries I used to take for granted like running water, a warm house and as much food as I want.

I pray that God will never let me forget Sarata.



Not So Invisible Man by Robert Chase

The sun is starting to come up and the seagulls are making a racket over some food left on the ground.

There is a cool breeze coming in from the shore.

The chilly salt air is a welcome change from the day before.

Some things don't change no matter the weather and he was one of them.

Not to suggest that he was a thing.

Though you may have looked upon him as less than a thing.

He is still a man.

His skin maybe weather beaten and dirty from living on the streets. His hair long and matted on his head and face and you can't help but wonder when he last had a bath.

On a morning like today his smell reaches your nose before you see him.

There he stands his clothes old and torn with his hand out and his eyes dull and lacking hope his lips chapped and whiskey burned asking for some change.

You walk on by. You could ask your self how he got that way but you think you already know and you could be right but you just might be wrong.

You go on your way pretending you didn't even see him. You know invisible.

Take a good look at me that man was once me and I am, the not so invisible man.

Robert Chase, the author of this poems, is a 51-year-old African American man who was homeless in Baltimore for 20 years. He is a recovering alcoholic and drug addict