

A Matter of Obedience

Leader's Guide

This Bible study is designed to help adults investigate what the Bible says about the poor and what God calls faithful followers to do in response to the poor. It is suggested for use in conjunction with Building on Faith, Habitat for Humanity International's worldwide celebration of church partnerships. During the week of Sept. 11-18, churches will help build numerous homes around the world with families previously living in poverty housing.

The study is meant to encourage discussion, but it can be used in a variety of class formats. Every class has its own personality, so adapt the material to make it work for you. For example, the opening options may work best as gathering activities for classes where members arrive at different times for the beginning of class. Some of the activities might work better as assignments during the week for participants who like to do research or for those who enjoy art. Don't discount the possibility that you might discover hidden talents, however. Be willing to take some risks and try new things. Consider your time limits and willingness of group members to participate.

Preparation

Before class, write the following Scripture references and questions on a chalkboard/whiteboard or on newsprint and cover them up until you are ready for the Bible study time.

Deuteronomy 15:3-11

Psalms 22:25-27

Psalms 140:12-13

Proverbs 29:6-7

1 Samuel 2:7-9

Psalms 82:2-4

Proverbs 21:13

- What do these verses tell us about God's perspective towards the poor?
- What do these verses tell us about how we should relate to the poor?
- Are there any promises from God for the poor or for people who help the poor?

Opening/Gathering Activities

Offer the following options to individuals (where appropriate) and small groups to help them begin thinking about God’s call to help the poor.

Do Some Research— Have volunteers find some of the following information. Some of the research may require a concordance and Internet access (perhaps the church office):

- Statistics on poverty in your community: hunger, homelessness, poverty housing etc.
- Aid organizations in your community—What help is available? What ministries does your church support? Why do you think those ministries have been selected?
- What is your church’s policy on individuals who come to the church asking for help? How are attitudes different towards those you “select” to help and those who select you?
- How many times does the word *poor* appear in the Bible?

Express It—Invite those who like to draw, paint etc., to express what poverty looks like or what the world looks like through the eyes of the poor.

You might also invite someone to express the image of “making all things new.”

Create a Story—Have group members imagine a day in the life of a family that lives in this house in Armenia. Have them write down some details of what a day might be like in that country or in a poor area of your community. Imagine what the family dreams of.



Develop an Advocacy Plan—If your congregation decides to become serious advocates for adequate housing in your community, what could you do? What issues would you have to address? What risks would you be willing to take? Start working on a plan for doing more than building houses.

Look At the Biblical Message

Gather the entire group and share some of your findings from the Gathering Activities. Open with prayer and then introduce the Bible study.

Churches and individuals begin supporting Habitat for Humanity for a variety of reasons, but a search into the Scriptures gives us a clear picture of God’s compassion for the poor and God’s call for faithful servants to care for the poor.

Reveal the list of Scripture passages and the questions listed in the “Preparation” section. In small groups or working together as a class, use the questions to help you determine the message of each passage. Not every question is addressed by each portion of Scripture. Below are listed some observations about the passages. Your group may come up with other ideas.

Deuteronomy 15:3-11

- God desires for our intent to be eliminating poverty.
- We should see attention to the needs of the poor as a matter of obedience.
- We are to have a tender heart and an open hand.
- God will bless us as we are attentive to the poor.

1 Samuel 2:7-9

- In eternity, God will elevate the poor that trust him into a special place of honor.

Psalms 22:25-27

- God promises, in eternity, to meet the needs of the poor who seek him.

Psalms 82:2-4

- We are commanded by God to be advocates for the poor.

Psalms 140:12-13

- When we work on behalf of the poor, we serve alongside God.
- God is a defender of the poor and needy.

- God associates attentiveness to the poor with righteousness.

Proverbs 21:13

- Ignoring the needs of the poor will have a negative impact on our relationship with God.

Proverbs 29:6-7

- God calls the person who cares for the poor *righteous*. He calls the person who has no concern for the poor *wicked*.

What Is God Saying to Me?

After looking at the Scripture passages, invite class members to answer these questions:

- What is the most compelling message in these Scripture passages? What is it telling you to do? What do you intend to do?
- What are the most comforting messages?
- What is the most difficult message for you to hear? Why?
- How does our church respond to the message in these passages?
- How do you as an individual respond to the message of these passages? (*answer silently*)

Consider What You Will Do

Acknowledge that it can be difficult, even shallow sometimes, to make a big plan after a one-week study, to take action. Jotting down a few notes if you do not intend to follow through is meaningless.

However, invite each person to truly spend time in prayer seeking God's guidance based on the Scripture messages you have heard today.

If your church is involved in a Habitat for Humanity project, perhaps class members want to get more involved in that build. Perhaps they can get more involved with the work of the local affiliate.

Consider more of the ideas about housing advocacy presented in the “Opening/Gathering Activities.” God may be calling some of your class members to be a voice for affordable housing in your community and in other locations.

Class members may be called to other ministries. Invite them to be in prayer to hear God’s call. Urge them to seek the confidence to respond.

Spend time in prayer as you close.