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“Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (II Corinthians 8,9).

Helping the Needy

Central Truth: You demonstrate obedience to God by meeting the needs of others.

L174. Date: December 1994. **Text:** Luke 4:16-21; II Corinthians 8:1, 2, 7.

Topic: Ministry; Service.

I remember, when I was just a lad, sitting in our country church and hearing my pastor exhort us, “Go out yonder and serve God.” And I remember wondering, “Where is 'out yonder'? How do I serve God when I get there?” I did not find the answer to those questions until many years later when I was a preacher.

The question “How do I serve God?” is answered very simply. “You serve God by serving people in the name of God.” And the question “Where is 'out yonder'?” is also answered easily. You serve God wherever you find a person in need whom you can help. The key to Christian service is, “Find a need and fill it.”

A deceased mother left her Bible to her daughter. On the flyleaf this verse was written: “You ask me what is the will of God,/and I will tell you true;/It is the nearest thing that should be done/That could be done by you.”

Jesus' Example of Helping the Needy (Luke 4:16-31)

Concern for the needy arises from a spirit of worship. Jesus went to His local synagogue (which would be like your going to your church) on the Sabbath, as was His custom. He was given the opportunity to read the Scriptures and was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He stood and read Isaiah 61:1; then He sat down (as their custom was) and spoke from

that text. From the context of worship He spoke of service to people in need.

Your worship will issue in service, also. And your service will inspire you to worship. Failure in one will indicate failure in the other. If you would serve, worship.

Concern for the needy must be according to the Scriptures. We believe in benevolence, but only according to Bible guidelines. There are some people who should not receive help: *“If any would not work, neither should he eat”* (II Thessalonians 3:10). On the other hand, those who are truly in need should be helped liberally and repeatedly as their needs require.

Concern for the needy is directed by the Holy Spirit. Before our Lord read one word about helping the needy, He read, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me”* (verse 18). Christian benevolence is not controlled by fickle human emotions; it is prompted by God's Spirit according to God's Word. Christian service is a sacred act by which God ministers through one of His children.

Concern for the needy is inclusive of all needs. Jesus did not leave out anyone. He said His ministry was to the poor, the sorrowing, the captives, the sick, the infirm, and the oppressed (verse 18). If He were ministering personally on earth today you would find Him in the hospitals, rescue missions, convalescent homes, and jails. He drew no distinctions between types of need. His compassion went out to any hurting person. Neither must you be selective about whom you help. The key is, *“Find a need and fill it.”*

Concern for the needy reveals God's grace. *“The acceptable year of the Lord”* (verse 19) means “the year of the Lord's favor, a year when men may find acceptance with the Lord.” Jesus' concern for the needy was a sign that God deals in grace with hurting people.

You see that today at home and abroad. Providing medical care or food often opens the door for a gospel witness. (Ask our medical missionaries.) You reflect the mercy of God when you help the needy; you also open the door to a testimony of salvation.

Our Response to Helping the Needy (II Corinthians 8,1-7)

The Christians in Greece heard that a drought had struck the land of Palestine. Their brothers and sisters in Christ were in dire need of the necessities of life. Paul wrote II Corinthians 8 and 9 to encourage them to give an offering to relieve the emergency. Note these principles as they followed the example of Jesus in helping the needy.

Helping the needy follows the example of others (verse 1). “Look at

what the churches of Macedonia (northern Greece) have done,” Paul wrote. He expected their example to stir up the churches in Achaia (southern Greece) so they would contribute to a relief fund also. And their example challenges us to give to meet needs which we see around us.

Helping the needy is possible in spite of personal trials (verse 2). We do not know the details of the hardships endured by the Christians in Macedonia. We only know that those difficulties could be described as “*a great trial of affliction.*” Paul does not dwell on the trials, however. He points to the offerings those suffering Christians gave in spite of their trials. What does that say about those occasions when we say we “just cannot afford to give”? Is our refusal to give to help others a true case of inability, or is it a preference to use what we have for ourselves? Remember the poor widow who gave her whole livelihood when she gave two mites (Mark 12:42). Remember the widow who shared her last bite of bread with God's prophet, expecting her and her son to starve to death after that. Remember those (and others), and release your hold on what you have. He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay (Proverbs 19:17).

Helping the needy arises from a willing heart (verses 3, 4). It is self-initiated. One translation of verse 4 states that the churches of Macedonia begged the apostles to accept their gifts and thereby let them share the honor of supporting their fellow Christians. No special appeals had to be made; no rewards had to be offered. The people were motivated by the love of God, and they gave. There is no reference to how much was given. Full attention is given to their desire to give. “*If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not*” (II Corinthians 8:12). The spirit which is willing to invest in the lives of people in need is the spirit of our Lord. Cultivate that attitude in your heart.

Helping the needy involves trusting faithful people to distribute the resources (verses 4-6). The church members in Macedonia asked Paul to take their gift and see that it was distributed in a proper manner. To avoid any possible misunderstanding about the handling of the funds, Paul joined with another brother who was selected by the churches as their representative. Together they received the funds and delivered them to the saints in Jerusalem. Thank God that we have such faithful Christian workers today.

Helping the needy is only one part of Christian growth (verse 7). Paul listed six areas in which the Christian is to continue to grow. Check yourself by this standard.

(1) Grow in faith. How? Pray for increased faith (Luke 17:5). Keep studying the Word (Romans 10:17). Put your faith to work (James 2:17).

(2) Grow in your witness. Live a testimony which says, “*Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul*” (Psalm 66:16). Seek to be more and more effective in your witness.

(3) Grow in your knowledge of the truth of God. Knowledge is worth any price it may cost (Proverbs 23:23), and it should be sought most diligently (II Peter 1:5).

(4) Grow in your unflinching earnestness. Work hard with a careful, steady effort. God requires that quality in each of His stewards (1 Corinthians 4:2).

(5) Grow in Christian love. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) and is commanded of God (I Peter 1:22).

(6) Grow in benevolence. In fact, you are to “*abound in this grace*” of helping the needy. You will find that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

What person in need has come to your thoughts as you have pursued this study? That is the person whom God would have you to help. Reach out today and show the love of Christ by your benevolence.