

PHILOSOPHY

One of the goals of Treasuring Christ Church is to reach across all boundaries for the sake of the gospel and for the glory of God. One of these cultural boundaries that gets a lot of biblical attention is poverty. In caring for the poor, the church's aim is to get the message of the gospel of hope to those who, due to life situations, feel hopeless. Following biblical principles, the church has an undeniable priority to care for the believing poor, that is, those whose lives have been radically altered by Jesus but who, as they follow him, experience financial, emotional, or physical neediness. This does not mean the church doesn't extend mercy to the unbelieving poor. It does mean that as we spend our time, money and other resources, the church's top priority should be the poor in our local body. To demonstrate this, we suggest that roughly 70% of the church's benevolence towards the poor will be given to believers and 30% to unbelievers. To further explain this concept consult the diagram to the right.

Often, the Bible speaks about caring for the poor. While one category of the poor is referring to the "poor in spirit" (ex. Matt. 5:3), another and more common usage is of the financially or physically poor. Yet these two categories should not be seen as mutually exclusive, as the gospel should permeate any attempt to help both the spiritually broken as well as the financially or physically bankrupt. Indeed, those who are physically poor graphically illustrate our own impoverished spiritual condition. Seeing the importance of caring for the poor in Jesus' earthly ministry, the church must see its responsibility to prioritize the believing poor. But as we follow Jesus' example, we cannot stop there. It was Jesus who called his followers to extend mercy to the battered man because of the injustice done to him in the story of the "good Samaritan" (Luke 10) and to invite to the dinner table not those who can pay you back but the poor who can't pay you back (Luke 14:13) and who described his coming as being anointed to "proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Therefore as we follow the example of Jesus' mission and try to keep biblical priorities with proper emphases, we have taken biblical categories in describing the poor and developed a chart as a visual tool to help us practically wade through caring for the poor. The numbers in each quadrant loosely represent biblical priorities while the crosshairs communicate categories.

Quadrant 1 (Guiltless/Believing) - For the church, ministry to the poor should first begin within the church. Biblically there are further distinctions made. Generally, priority should be given to believers who are poor by "no fault of their own" (Jer. 23:4). Biblical examples include widows who are faithful to God and have no family able to care for them (1 Tim 5:35). As we try to practically implement this principle, other examples might include: infant orphans, believers who are heavily burdened with medical bills, believers who are oppressed by governments and social structures, or individuals associated with the persecuted church around the world, who are living in physical poverty as a result (Acts 2, Galatians 2:10, 69-70, Matthew 25:40).

Quadrant 2 (Guilty/Believing) - Those in this quadrant, still in the "household of faith" that Paul states we should care for first (Gal. 6:10), are believers who are poor because they somehow aided in their own financial or physical detriment. Biblically, Paul addresses the believers who are idle saying, "If one is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). So maybe they were guilty of idleness, which led to physical or financial poverty but are now repentant and desire help and accountability. Another example could be a repentant believer who is striving to free himself from debt accrued because of past foolish choices but despite a sustained effort it is improbable that he will pay it off without help.

Quadrant 3 (Guiltless/Unbelieving) - The guiltless/unbelieving are those who are poor "by no fault of their own" (Jer. 23:4), yet they are not followers of Jesus and should not be given priority over categories one or two. Practically, quadrants 3 and 4 get roughly 30% of the church's designated resources. As we speak the gospel to unbelievers, Jesus' example and emphasis to the poor leads the people of the church to intentionally engage the unbelieving poor. Those belonging to this quadrant might include: unbelieving widows, unbelieving orphaned, abandoned, or abused kids, those heavily burdened with medical bills, and unbelievers oppressed by governments, social structures or individuals, who are living in physical poverty as a result.

Quadrant 4 (Guilty/Unbelieving) - The final priority of caring for the poor lies within members of the guilty/unbelieving community. Members of this quadrant are those who are not trusting in Christ and who have made poor decisions to aid in their own financial or physical detriment. Examples of those within this quadrant would be: those with large amounts of consumer debt, addicts of any sort, prostitutes, etc. For practical ways to love the poor, see the following sections.

