

EQUIPPED: Tough Questions

Chapter 8

What's the Bible Say About Work, Responsibility, Entitlement, and Welfare?

A domestic diva I am not. My first attempt at homemade candy testifies to my diva-less-ness. With the recipe in one hand and a spoon in the other, I very carefully added all the ingredients, blended them together for the prescribed amount of time and poured it all into a pan.

Consistently stirring the yummy sweetness, I anxiously waited for it to reach the perfect temperature. Then I quickly placed spoonfuls of the bitesize mouthwatering morsels onto a cookie sheet and waited for them to cool and magically turn into hard candy perfection.

As I reached down to pick up a piece of my very first homemade candy, I quickly realized that something went terribly wrong. It was round, yes. But hard? No. Squeezed between my fingers was a gooey, sticky, messy attempt to create something we'd all love. Instead, it wasn't even edible.

Today, as we start stirring up the ingredients that make up these complicated issues of our day, I want to let you know up front... things are going to get a little sticky and pretty messy.

After all, it's pretty hard to reconcile seemingly opposing viewpoints. Like lawyers pitted against each other in a hard-fought court case. One representing the defendant. The other representing the plaintiff. Both with strong cases, but only one can ultimately win.

Today's study will be much like a hard-fought court case. All sides will be presented. You will examine the evidence for yourself to make a determination. But there will be no hung jury and no mistrial. When the gavel drops at the end of the lesson, the answer will be clear.

Lines can get profoundly blurred when people, families and precious souls hang in the balance.

Humanity beckons human aid for the hurting, the hungry, and the down and out. Christianity craves a consuming compassion for the

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poor and needy, demanding that we see and hear and care deeply with our hearts what we wince at with our eyes.

We do that, ya know? Wincing away from the messy, unkempt homeless man standing at the stop light, holding a sign saying, *Will work for food*, we look down at our phones, glance in the rearview mirror, hoping not to see what our peripheral vision can't miss.

In this study, we are going to look at parallel passages that speak to both sides of the issue and discover how they aren't contradictory concepts, but instead, they are threads woven together to create a tapestry of truth.

As we meander our way through the Word, we're going to find that we may need to change the narrative. Instead of asking questions like *Should we help the poor?* we need to be asking *Who should be helping the poor?* Instead of asking *How much do they need?* we should be asking *What will help them most?*

Perhaps when it comes to welfare, we're actually missing the point.

If the poor are consistently being helped and they have the ability to work, is it really the kind of help they need? And if those who are unable to work are receiving the help they need, are they missing out on the love and support that comes from more than a monthly check in the mail?

I so desperately want you to see the whole picture so that it makes sense to you, my friend. So, to give a framework for our study, we're going to begin by sharing a parallel look at many of the passages that speak to the issues we face. Then, we will navigate our way through the Word and examine the five key points below.

1. *The Definition of Needy*
2. *The Intent of Helping Those in Need*
3. *The Results of Helping Those in Need in Our Current System*
4. *The Opportunity to Help Those in Need Biblically*

We've got a lot of biblical ground to cover together, so, strap yourself in, sweet friend! It's gonna be fun. Studying God's Word always is. :)

Fill in the chart below noting concepts in each passage regarding work, treatment of and assistance to the needy. Also note who is to work and who is to give where applicable:

Scripture	What the verse says about work	Scripture	What the verse says about helping
<u>Gen 3:17-19</u>		<u>Lev 25:35-37</u>	
<u>Gen 2:15</u>		<u>Lev 23:22</u>	
<u>Prov 10:4-5</u>		<u>Lev 25:25-27</u>	
<u>Prov 12:11</u>		<u>Deut 23:19-20</u>	
<u>Prov 13:4</u>		<u>Ex 22:25</u>	
<u>Prov 14:23-24</u>		<u>Ps 82:3-4</u>	
<u>Prov 24:30-34</u>		<u>Prov 21:13</u>	
<u>Prov 28:19-20</u>		<u>Isaiah 58:10</u>	
<u>Ecc1 9:10</u>		<u>Matt 10:42</u>	
<u>Matt 20:6-7</u>		<u>Matt 5:42</u>	
<u>Acts 20:35</u>		<u>Mark 14:7</u>	
<u>2 Tim 2:6-7</u>		<u>Luke 3:11</u>	
<u>1 Tim 5:16</u>		<u>John 12:4-8</u>	
<u>1 Tim 5:8</u>		<u>Acts 2:44-47</u>	
<u>2 Thes 3:10-12</u>		<u>Gal 6:10</u>	
<u>1 Thes 4:11-12</u>		<u>1 Tim 6:18-19</u>	
<u>Eph 4:28</u>		<u>James 2:1-9</u>	
<u>Col 3:23</u>		<u>James 2:15-17</u>	

Oh, my sweet friend, didn't I tell you it was going to get sticky?!

Just one read through of each of those power-packed passages leaves us with our jaws hanging and scratching our heads as we wonder how in the world can we reconcile two distinctly different truths. Not to mention that the verses provided are just a snapshot of God's Word on this sensitive subject.

I purposefully placed them side-by-side so you could get a gander at *who* the workers and givers are because it's key to the biblical precedent for working and giving.

Throughout the history of mankind, people have experienced lack, need, and hardships...often due to events out of their control.

Recent events like hurricanes Harvey and Irma, and the California fires all give us examples of how someone can lose everything they own overnight.

- *Imagine losing it all.*
- *Imagine local businesses unable to operate for a long length of time due to a catastrophic event.*
- *Imagine not being able to receive a paycheck for two months or more.*
- *Imagine not being able to find your birth certificate or other important documents.*
- *Imagine having no place to live and no money for a hotel.*
- *Imagine the devastating loss of a loved one in the midst of losing everything that you own.*

So let's begin by identifying who it is that really needs help.

1. THE DEFINITION OF NEEDY

The Poor and Needy - Jesus said the poor you will have with you always (Matthew 26:11) and Deuteronomy 15:11 echoes that same truth as well as instructing us to open our hands wide to those who are poor.

Read the following verses and describe what it says about the poor and our response to those who are described as poor. Proverbs 14:31, 19:17, 22:9, 31:8, Luke 12:33-34 _____

With the exception of once, the Greek word used in the New Testament for *poor* is *ptōchos*. It means one who is reduced to begging, one who exists in extreme poverty, lacking. It is sometimes used in reference to spiritually or morally lacking, but most often used for one who is basically a destitute.

To be poor in the biblical sense means to be someone who is continually in a state of poverty. It is different than one who stands in need temporarily.

A person in need may be among those who lost their homes in the California fires or the hurricanes who may walk through a season of need but end up back on their feet and, in time, be able to take care of themselves with a little help.

Biblically, the *needy* are in a state of need most often temporarily due to a life-altering event such as losing a job, sickness or surgery, imprisonment, or some other circumstance. The *poor* are generally in a more consistent state of lack and often not able to provide for themselves or their families. Scripture describes the poor as *oppressed, weak, and dependent*.

The poor and the needy stand in desperate need of help. And God's Word calls those who have to minister help to those who don't.

The Orphans and Widows - Interesting that the Word of God often links widows and orphans together in the same sentence. Perhaps that's because widows and orphans represent the most helpless and vulnerable members of any society.

Families were headed by men and if a husband passed away, the widow and her children were left to beg for food and often lost their homes and all of their possessions. Both widows and orphans were mistreated, abused, sold into slavery, and even killed. That's no way to live and, certainly, no way to die.

But God demonstrates a special tender loving care for orphans and widows.

What do the following verses say about widows and orphans? Deuteronomy 10:18, Psalm 68:5, Psalm 146:9, Hosea 14:3

According to Exodus 22:22 and James 1:27, how are we to treat and care for orphans and widows? _____

The Disabled - The disabled are those with different types of handicaps that prevent them from fully providing and/or caring for themselves. Just as God demonstrates a special tender loving care for orphans and widows, He extends that same special love and care for those who are disabled.

Read through the following verses and describe God's heart for those with disabilities as well as how we are to care for them. Exodus 4:11, John 9:1-3, Isaiah 42:16, Proverbs 31:8 _____

Defining those who are *sincerely* in need equips us with the understanding of "who" it is that we should be assisting. The poor and needy. The orphan and the widow. The one with a disability that prevents him from providing for and/or caring for himself.

Big hearts hunger to help all who put their hands out. But not every person who says they are in need actually need any help at all. Or maybe the kind of help they are seeking isn't the kind that will be in their best interest. That's why knowing "who" to help makes us better helpers.

2. THE INTENT OF HELPING THOSE IN NEED

In our little corner of the world, here in the United States, there's a government program aimed at assisting those who are sincerely in need. Like those defined above. But as you read through the verses in the chart on page 3, the ones who are to do the assisting are described as God's people. It's the church that should be making the difference in the lives of those in need of help.

The thing is, the government isn't a charitable organization. Nowhere in Scripture is the command to help the needy a decree to a government body. It is, however, a command to God's people individually and collectively.

Read Deuteronomy 15:10-11 and describe who it is we are called to help and God's response to those who give. _____

The problem is, the church has taken a back seat and forgotten not only her calling but the whole point of giving to those in need. The intent in giving is threefold...

1. To display the love of God

Love is seen best when we reach out to those who are in need most. When we give, we remind others that love is more than words. Love is what we do...and we love deep and wide and hard and sacrificially because we have been loved deep and wide and hard and sacrificially beyond any love we can comprehend by the Creator of the universe.

And when we love with the love of God, and share the truth of the Gospel, we remind the world of His love for them.

1 John 3:16-18 tells us, *“16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”*

2. To demonstrate a heart of love for and obedience to God - and, by the way, blessings come to those who give

Jesus said, if we love Him, we will keep His commandments ([John 14:15](#)) and [1 John 5:3](#) reminds us that His commandments aren’t grievous to us.

[Deuteronomy 15:10](#) tells us to give freely to those in need and [2 Corinthians 9:7](#) says God loves a cheerful giver.

And [Proverbs 22:9](#) and [Matthew 6:3-4](#) remind us that there is a blessing that is ours when we give to help others.

The call of Christ is consistently to give and love and forgive. The government can’t do that. It can only supply a cold lifeless, faceless check. We can show them the love of Christ.

3. To make a temporal, and hopefully and eternal difference in the lives of others

When we lived on the mission field, we saw a lot of charitable organizations making a huge humanitarian impact by amazing teams who would mow, blow, and go as soon as the work was done. Food, shelter, and medical help were all powerful ways to make a difference in the lives of those in need.

We aren't called to make people comfortable on their way to hell. The mission of giving is ultimately the Great Commission. To reach people with the Gospel and teach them the Word of God. We supply a temporal need to earn a listening ear so that we can share the eternal hope that comes with knowing Christ.

2 Corinthians 8:13-15 says, *"13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; 14 but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. 15 As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."*

Ultimately the intent of helping those in need is that they will see Jesus and want the love of Jesus that changes people and makes them givers not takers, carers not cold-hearted, loving not heartless - to be a testimony of light and love and grace in a world of darkness and hatred and selfishness.

The government can't do that. You and I can. Our churches can. Our ministries can.

There are so many great organizations making a difference in the lives of those in need. Not just an earthly difference, but an eternal difference. We need to all be busy doing what they are doing. Individually and corporately.

Imagine! What would it look like if the church was fulfilling the biblical call to take care of those who are hurting and in need most? Would they see love instead of a check? Would they see hope instead of hopelessness? Would they see Jesus instead of Uncle Sam?

How does knowing the intent of giving to those in need change the way you think about giving? And how can you help develop a more hands on approach to giving in your own life and perhaps even in your church? _____

2. THE RESULTS OF HELPING THOSE IN NEED IN OUR CURRENT SYSTEM

This is so very personal for me. I was a single mom who could barely keep food on the table and a roof over my head. I've waited in the long lines for food stamps, filled out the complicated pages for assistance, and applied for government housing.

The \$13 in food stamps they said I qualified for wasn't worth the gas it would take me to get there or the 3 hours I would have to stand in line to get it. Although my income was far below the poverty rate, I didn't meet the requirements for financial assistance. I did, however, qualify for government housing.

Unfortunately, I quickly learned that the system is designed in such a way that it makes it much easier for those in need to get in than it does for them to get out.

I also learned the more children you have, the more money you can get from the government every month.

My next door neighbor was a single mom with two children. One day, she glanced over at me and told me that she was going to have another baby. I thought she meant she was pregnant again. But she wasn't. She proceeded to tell me that more children meant more money so her plan was to get pregnant on purpose so she would be able to have a higher income.

There was no way to work your way out unless you moved from one financial extreme to another. Each pay raise, meant paying more in rent immediately, so you never could get ahead. Many just succumbed to what I call social slavery and reduced the value of their lives to whatever the government was willing to pay them.

Social slavery is real. A *possibly* well-meaning system that began to help the poor has actually kept the poor in poverty rather than helping them work their way out.

In other words, the system makes it easier for people to sit home and draw a monthly welfare check than it does for them to go to work and find worth and satisfaction in providing for themselves.

Unfortunately, here are some of the results of the current welfare system:

- *Instead of helping people up and out of poverty, the current government system keeps them bound to it.*
- *It discourages work and innovation.*
- *It's a dream killer and ambition stealer.*
- *It discourages marriage and has been a huge reason for the decline in traditional family structure.*
- *It devalues you children by putting a price tag on them.*
- *It leaves a large number of welfare recipients in bondage to the government and increases poverty rather than decreasing it.*
- *It encourages dependence rather than stimulating independence.*

Here are some eye-opening statistics:

- *Close to 35% of Americans receive some sort of government assistance.*
- *Close to 50 million Americans receive food stamps.*
- *27% of those living below poverty level are single moms compared with only 5.1% of married couples.*
- *As of September 2017, 31% of adults are not employed.*
- *57% of immigrant households (legal and illegal) receive some sort of government welfare. Welfare is not helping them achieve the American dream. It preventing them from pursuing it.*
- *Illegal immigrants aren't supposed to be able to receive welfare of any kind. However, they often are able to receive Medicaid, housing assistance, medical assistance, and an education at the U.S. taxpayers' expense. (We covered some of this in chapter 5.)*

Welfare costs have skyrocketed from \$422 per person in poverty in 1960 to \$18,013 per person in poverty in 2016. That means a family of 4 is receiving an average of \$72,050 on poverty even though the poverty rate is only \$24,563.

Even if we deduct medical costs that are associated with that \$18,013 per person, the rate still puts that family well above poverty at \$8,945 per person making the household income for a family of 4 in poverty \$35,779.¹

Since 1964 when President Lyndon Johnson declared a war on poverty, the United States has spent over \$20 trillion dollars.

Unfortunately, it has done nothing to decrease poverty in our nation. In fact, poverty has increased dramatically. Perhaps because it's more cost effective to stay on welfare than it is to get a low level job and begin the journey of working your way up.

The bottom line is, the current welfare system isn't helping the vast majority of recipients out of welfare. People can't become who God created them to be if they are limited by what has become generational social slavery. If children are born into the system and they think there is nothing more or better for them, they will rarely aspire to be more than what they are told by the government they can be. A welfare recipient.

Welfare doesn't free people from its sticky web, it enslaves them to it. Generational social slavery creates a generation of those who think they are entitled to privileges and provision.

¹ [FederalSafetyNet.com, http://federalsafetynet.com/poverty-and-spending-over-the-years.html](http://federalsafetynet.com/poverty-and-spending-over-the-years.html)
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ENTITLEMENT

The welfare system has done much to hurt generations of people rather than helping them. But probably one of the most overlooked byproducts of decades of entitlement programs is the entitlement mentality they create.

Entitlement is the belief that one is deserving of or entitled to certain privileges.

Our culture has created an ineffective, in-cohesive, unplanned system that has no true tangible objectives and no real way to coordinate the more than 10 government programs in order to assure that all recipients receive the same level of assistance. Some learn how to work the system and wind up with a high level of assistance, while others end up with very little help.

Many have made it their *jobs* to develop different ways to milk the system. All that time and creativity could be used in a *real* job to make *real* money to provide a *real* income to support their family. So many have no idea what opportunities lay beyond their government's monthly allotment.

They are missing out on what it means to thrive instead of just survive and to have a sense of accomplishment instead of maintaining a sense of entitlement.

We have to be responsible for what we are responsible for! We have to teach our children how to be responsible for themselves. Something has to be done. And that leads us to our next point... *What can we do? What difference can we make with the current system being what it is?*

4. THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP THOSE IN NEED BIBLICALLY

I tend to think outside the box when it comes to taking ground for the Kingdom and making an eternal difference in the lives of those God has placed on this planet. That's why I started The MOM Initiative.

I wanted to develop a creative way to reach moms for Christ and minister to those who know Him. Mentoring moms is doubly effective because it not only impacts the mom we are ministering to, it also influences the children she is raising.

So, this is a chance for us to dream big creative dreams about helping people with the purpose of making more than a temporary impact on their lives. These are the things that missionary minds mull over and over in their hearts.

How can we earn a listening ear so that we can ultimately reach them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ? How can we take the opportunity to help those who know Christ grow and be encouraged and strengthened in their walk with the Lord and in their personal ambitions?

Here are a few ideas you might be able to begin implementing in your own life and in the life of your church.

Get Involved:

- Get involved with policies at the legislative policy-making level to help the system that exists now. Ultimately it's what we have and until it changes, we need to do what we can to help it be more effective and purposeful.
- Get involved with local organizations and ministries that exist to help those in need. Find out how you can help them be more effective in meeting their goals to help assist the poor, needy, helpless, and homeless.
- Get involved in your church and be part of the solution. Create a culture that begins the conversation about being the church in the community and making a difference through biblically assisting those in need.

Collection Drives:

- Collect new clothing, backpacks, and school supplies for school-age children and individually, or as a church, host a community wide giveaway or adopt a local school and have the giveaway there... or adopt a local low-income community and have the giveaway there.
- Individually or as a church, collect wheelchairs, walkers, and other health and safety items to help those who need them and let the congregation know they are there for those in need.
- Individually or as a church, develop a food pantry and invite the congregation and the community to utilize it during times of personal need.
- Individually or as a church, connect with local and national ministries that specialize in specific areas to help those in need in your community. When individuals, churches, and ministries work together, they can accomplish much more collectively than they can alone.
- Individually or as a church, collect personal hygiene items, clothing, socks, shoes, underwear, lotions and other needs for the homeless and deliver them to a homeless camp or at a local homeless shelter.

- Host a community baby shower for a local apartment complex or low-income area and shower them with sweet gifts and mom advice. Let them know you're there for them and mentor them in their mom journey if they are interested.
- Individually or as a church, collect food for special events and holidays to give out to those in need.

Mentoring and Teaching:

- Mentor moms on biblical and practical motherhood.
- Mentor women on financial planning, budgeting, and couponing.
- Teach cooking skills, meal preparation, and eating healthy on a dime.
- Teach organization skills, homemaking, and decorating.
- Mentor women through the Bible to reach them for Christ and help those who know Him grow.
- Host a community dinner and invite women from your neighborhood over to create a sense of belonging and letting them know you're there for them.
- Host a community dinner or get together at a local community center or apartment complex and offer future classes that cover things like resume writing, employment skills, and computer and technology skills.
- Teach English as a second language at your church or at the local community center.

A government check is a temporary fix. Learning life and employment skills will enable people to escape the social slavery system and begin earning real wages from a real job.

Service Projects:

- Mow lawns for those who can't or can't afford to hire someone.
- Clean someone's home who is unable to.
- Make meals for those who have recently gone through surgeries or are disabled.
- Organize a lawn clean-up group to pick up debris after a storm for those who can't.
- Offer to take those who are unable to drive to the store or to doctor appointments.
- Offer to care for a single mom's children while she works for an extended period of time so she can begin saving. If you charge her a small amount, save it for her and give it to her as a gift to help her get out of the social welfare system.

These are just a few ideas to help you think outside the box and make a difference in the lives of those in need. There are a host of opportunities to give people a hand up instead of relegating them to monthly handouts.

Life offers so much more than generation after generation of welfare. We, the church, need to help those who feel stuck, who feel hopeless, and who are sincerely in need to discover their God-given potential and a message of hope and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The government can't offer any of that. But you and I can. You and I should.

SUMMING IT UP

Work creates a sense of value and fulfillment. Welfare creates a sense of hopelessness and entitlement. Giving to those in need is biblical. But so is working to provide for your household.

Ultimately, if a person refused to work, our responsibility to help them ceases. We may be able to equip them with job skills that can help them become gainfully employed, but financially assisting them only enables them to be trapped in an entitlement mentality and mooch off of others.

The lines get a little blurry when it's someone you know and love - when it's your children, or your parents, or your sibling. It's hard when you see someone who won't work and it is affecting their children.

What do you do?

You help the children and assure them you are there for them but you don't enable the person who refuses to work. You may even have to contact the authorities if the children are neglected or are in danger.

I remember when my sister-in-law died because of an overdose, we were preparing ourselves to raise my brother-in-law's children. He wasn't sure what he was going to do and we knew we needed to be there for the children regardless of what he decided to do.

He got his act together and raised his children on his own.

But things like that happen all of the time. And hard decisions have to be made not only for the welfare of the children, but also for the best interest of the person who struggles with drug addiction, refusal to work, or other life challenges that keep that person from providing for his or her family.

Loving someone well means doing what is in the best interest of the one you love. And sometimes love is tough. But it makes people better, and stronger, and responsible. The poor and needy will be with us always. Unfortunately, there are some who cling to irresponsibility like a life-long crutch and it affects his or her family and friends in profound ways.

May we help those who sincerely need help with the intent of sharing the love of Christ, helping them be better and stronger and know they are loved, and may we willingly meet the tangible needs of the poor and needy so that we can have an opportunity to share the hope of the Gospel and see them come to know Christ.

After all, that's what it's all about anyway!

DIG DEEPER

A DIFFERENT TAKE

Have you ever wondered if we are getting in the way of what God is trying to do in someone's life?

Sometimes we do just that. The poor and needy are in need of the Lord showing up in their lives in a real and powerful way. The need Jesus much more than they need our handouts.

We can't be their functional saviors. Only Jesus can save them. Only Jesus can deliver them. Only Jesus can forgive them of their sins and set them free from whatever they're in bondage to.

We need to prayerfully be careful not to come to the rescue of someone God is trying to reveal Himself to.

Helping others should always be bathed in prayer, even when you know that person is sincerely in need.

Perhaps God still may lead you to help but with a message of hope, not just with a handout of food or clothing. Maybe the Lord wants you to show up on someone's door step with a bag of groceries and an offer of a job and financial training.

The goal is to seek His face for the hearts and lives of those He leads you to help.

Read the following verses and describe God’s desired interaction, involvement, and relationship with the poor. Psalm 12:5, Psalm 14:6, Isaiah 25:4, Isaiah 41:17 _____

God’s heart for the poor, needy, widows, and orphans runs deeper and wider than any morsel of help we can give them. He longs to give them what we can’t. Peace, hope, healing, and a new heart and life.

Sometimes in our efforts to step in to help, we blind them to their own need and prevent them from seeing where their real hope lies. Perhaps God is dealing with someone who needs to repent in a specific area and we keep enabling them to stay poor.

NOTES
