



abclinks

connecting personal and small group studies with this week's sermon

For the sermon on January 12-13, 2008

this week's coreverse

"Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you."

James 1.27 NLT

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Personal Bible Studies (inside pages)

- Personal studies explore Scripture passages related to this week's sermon. They are broken down into three or four days. Some days are called "take it in." On these days, you will simply read, meditate or think about a passage from scripture. Other days are called "work it out." Here you'll be asked to dig into a passage through reading, studying and answering questions.

Small Group Discussion (back page)

- Small group questions that connect with the sermon and your personal Bible study. This series of questions acts as a funnel to help your group discussion flow in a purposeful point.
- If you are not in a small group, contact one of our small group staff members for more information on ABC Small Groups or go to adabible.org>ministries>small groups.

See adabible.org for abclinks archives.



Part One of a Three Part Sermon Series

"Complicated Generosity"

After a difficult conversation with someone in emotional crisis, I sought some advice from a friend who works as a counselor. He gave me an image that was helpful. He said, "Imagine a person thrashing in the water. They appear to be helplessly drowning. Their cries for help are loud and their hands are straining to grab on to someone to pull into their ocean of despair. They truly feel and certainly look like they are helpless in their life circumstances. Frankly though, many people just need encouragement or guidance in how to stand up in the water because it's really only waste deep. What most people need is a lifeline to help them get their balance again." So I began to think, if that's true, who are truly helpless in our world? And, what's our responsibility to them?

The authors of the Bible identified the helpless in their time and culture as being the widows, orphans and refugees. Because the mortality rate of men was so high, widows and orphans were prevalent. Husbands and fathers were often victims of war or disease. Famine and war created another type of helplessness, the refugee. When people became displaced because of a disaster or war, people wandered into Israel homeless and penniless. No welfare. No job assistance programs. No social services. Who would help the helpless?

God's answer was His people! He desired for His people to be the world leaders in caring for the helpless. When the rest of the world walks by and ignores the destitute, God's people immerse themselves in the difficult, complex and sometimes messy work of caring for the helpless.

Who do you know that has dedicated significant energy to helping the helpless? When I look around my circle, I see a couple that just adopted three children. Yes, three! Their ages are seven, five and a newborn; all from the same mother whom the state determined incapable of caring for them. These children were destined to be separated, moved from foster home to foster home as wards of the state. Tim and Susan, who already have two wonderful daughters approaching their teenage years, made the choice to expand their family, adding complexity and struggle to their lives. Their choice affected everything. Diapers and 2 am feedings re-entered their routine. Their finances were affected with three more kids to feed and clothe. Their home and vehicles had to change to accommodate a family of seven rather than four. Their hearts had to grow in tenderness and patience as everything around them changed because they chose to obey God's command to help the helpless.

Helping the hurting is complex. Sometimes it requires throwing a lifeline of encouragement and direction to get them back on their feet. Other times, God asks us to radically adjust our lives to care for those who are unable to care for themselves.



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personal bible studies

dayone

God's heart for the helpless is huge! In the days of the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was called by God to be responsive to the needs of those who were unable to help themselves. Widow, orphans and refugees were the primary ones whom God called out for His people to be vigilant in caring for.

Today's readings express the heart of God and His directives concerning the helpless. Read each passage and jot down some observations.

Exodus 22.21-22

Deuteronomy 24.17-21

Job 29.11-13

Psalms 68.5

Isaiah 1.17

How does God see the helpless? What is His desire for them?

daytwo

As the Jesus movement began in Jerusalem following Jesus' death and resurrection, there was a carryover of the responsibility of Israel to care for the helpless. A prevalent concern for the first church was how to care for the many widows who were part of their church community. Because of the complexity of the issue, the church leaders needed to create some structure to insure quality and equality in their care. Read the following passages and jot down some of your observations.

Acts 6.16

How did the church leaders structure and embrace their responsibility to care for those who were vulnerable? What was the result?

Acts 9.36-41

Describe Dorcas. Why was she so important to the people around her?

James 1.27 True religion = _____. Why? If so, what is false religion?

daythree

Timothy was a young pastor who Paul left to lead in the church of Ephesus. Paul wrote two letters to his protégé and friend. His first letter was filled with advice and direction on how to lead the church. The issue of widow care was very important for Paul to address with Timothy. Women who had lost their husbands were extremely vulnerable to predators, thieves and swindlers. Paul implores Timothy to take special care of the widows.

Read 1 Timothy 5.3-16.

The care of the widows in the early church was complex. What could you imagine were some of the complexities?

Paul's advice gives Timothy some structure on how to deal with caring for the widows. Jot down some of these phrases from the passage. What structures of care do you see at ABC for those in need?

Who is more responsible for the care of a widow, her family or her church? How? Why?

Our responsibility to our parents goes back to the 5th Commandment. God said, ***"Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you."*** Exodus 20.12 NLT

Compare this to Paul's words, ***"But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God."*** 1 Timothy 5.4 NLT

Do these verses connect? How?

Do you have parents or grandparents who are approaching the age where they cannot take care of themselves as they once used to? What's your plan to insure you are obedient in your family responsibility to help that person who is growing helpless?

What complexities do you face in caring for your family? Circle any that apply to you.

Distance in geography

Time

Family Dynamics

Finances

Relational Issues

How can these be overcome or set aside? What do you need to do or say so that the care for your family member can be more effective?

Over the next few weeks, commit to intentionally look to identify the "helpless" in your world. Start by looking in your family. Broaden your view to your community or city, then look worldwide. Turn your "radar" on as you read the newspaper, watch TV or browse the web. Ask God how you are to engage with those who struggle to help themselves. Caution: God may lead you on an adventure of a lifetime!



small group discussion

lean in

What image comes to your mind when you hear the word “helpless”? Share stories of how your life has crossed paths with someone who could be described that way.

lookdown

Read 1 Timothy 5. 3-8 aloud.

What structure did Paul give Timothy on how to care for the widows in his church community?

What responsibility did Paul give to the family for their care? Why do you think Paul made that distinction?

What responsibility did Paul give to the widow for her own care?

lookout

Caring for hurting people today can get complicated. What complexities do you see in our society that affect how widows, orphans and refugees receive what they need?

How would you say the “helpless” are treated in our culture?

lookin

Do you have a parent or grandparent who has growing care needs? What issues or complexities are you facing? How has this passage or study challenged, convicted or affirmed your efforts?

What resources do you see at Ada Bible Church designed to help those in need? How should these resources interplay with a needy person’s family or even small group community?

How is God challenging you as an individual or a small group to engage with the “helpless”? Have you identified a project, a person or organization to connect with? What’s your plan? How’s it going?

lookup

Spend a few minutes sharing prayer requests. Spend some time praying for those who are caring for family members in need. Pray also for God to bring you an adventure in meeting the needs of someone who is helpless.

discover
more

Surf! On the web, research these organizations and assess how they strive to care for the helpless and hurting.

- *Inner City Christian Federation*
- *Mel Trotter Mission*
- *Degage*
- *Pregnancy Resource Center*
- *Faith Hospice*

Read! If you haven’t yet read Charles Mulli’s book, *Father to the Fatherless*, pick up a copy at The ARC. Charles and his wife, Esther, care for over 900 kids through their orphanage called Mully Children’s Family. Charles’ book tells how God provided for them to give hope, love, education and life’s necessities to some of Africa’s helpless: kids who were orphaned or abandoned because of AIDs or drug abuse. Pray for MCF today! Political unrest is creating devastating violence around them. ABC is a ministry partner with MCF.