

VINEYARD DISTINCTIVES



REMEMBER

**THE POOR**

CARING FOR THE LEAST, THE LAST, AND THE LOST

vineyardusa™



# REMEMBER THE POOR

Introduction ..... 5

What Jesus Said About The Poor ..... 7

What The Poor Mean To Us ..... 11

How Can We Serve The Poor? ..... 14

Becoming A Compassionate People ..... 18

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THE KING WILL REPLY,  
"TRULY I TELL YOU,  
WHATEVER YOU DID FOR  
ONE OF THE LEAST OF  
THESE BROTHERS AND  
SISTERS OF MINE,  
YOU DID FOR ME."

MATT. 25:40

ALL THEY ASKED WAS THAT  
WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO  
REMEMBER THE POOR, THE  
VERY THING I HAD BEEN  
EAGER TO DO ALL ALONG.

GAL. 2:10

# INTRODUCTION: A VINEYARD VIEW OF THE POOR

Who are the poor? Today, we often see poverty through the lens of economics or personal financial weakness. In the New Testament, however, the poor are generally seen as those who are *powerless* in society, and who therefore lack the basic necessities they need to sustain their lives. Without resources, and without a voice, they lack not only power, but also social respect and material goods. Because of the daily stresses of survival, relationships often break down. Poverty is a disease of society, and the remedies for all our social ills are found in the life and teaching of Jesus.

In the Scriptures, it seems that God has a special place in his heart for the poor. Poverty is mentioned, directly or indirectly, more than 2000 times in the Bible. Reminding us of the Church's call to care for the marginalized and impoverished among us, Jesus said words that pierce us to this day:

"...Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

The Vineyard family of churches leans toward the poor, the outcast, and the outsider with the compassion of Jesus. From the beginning of our movement, Vineyard churches have worked to actively serve the poor in the most practical ways possible – in our towns, cities, and spheres of influence. John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard, was personally committed to calling us to a radically compassionate life in the way of Jesus.

In the Vineyard, we believe that faithfulness to Jesus means that we are faithful to remember the poor, serve the poor, build community among the poor – and love the poor compelled by the love of God.





# WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE POOR

## The Poor In The Old Testament

In the Gospels, we see Jesus spending a considerable amount of time among the poor, serving them, encouraging them, and even standing up for them. He was carrying on the deep, rich Jewish biblical tradition of providing for those in need.

These words from the book of Deuteronomy reveal God's tenderness toward the socially vulnerable:

"He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing" (Deut. 10:18).

"If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs" (Deut. 15:7-8).

"There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land" (Deut. 15:11).

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (Is. 58:6-7).

## The Poor In The Gospels

From these roots, Jesus calls the early Church to commit to seek out the poor and dignify them with their care:

"Looking at his disciples he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God'" (Luke 6:20).

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

"...But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,

and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:13-14).

## The Poor In The New Testament

Following Jesus' example, the apostles and the early Church embody Jesus' love for the poor:

"All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along" (Gal. 2:10).

"Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Rom. 12:13).

"Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (James 2:5).

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

## A Movement That Cares For The Poor

After Jesus' resurrection, in the earliest years of the Church, the Roman government struggled to care for the masses of widows and orphans overrunning their society. Motivated by Jesus' model, and realizing that the poor were to be welcomed as Jesus *himself*, the early Christians addressed the issues of social struggle surrounding orphans and widows. Some scholars suggest this may have been the primary reason the Church grew like wildfire in its first century of life.

Since those early days, the church of Jesus Christ has been marked by our care for the least, the last, and the lost. When the marginalized and forgotten of any society are brought into the center of a loving community that worships Christ, powerful things begin to happen.

Jesus has called us to care for the poor – both for their sake and our own.

HOW DO WE MINISTER  
TO THE POOR? WE MEET  
THEM, BEFRIEND THEM,  
LISTEN TO AND LEARN  
FROM THEM, LOVE AND  
SERVE THEM, AND INVITE  
THEM INTO OUR FAMILY  
TO SHARE WHAT WE  
HAVE – THE HOPE AND  
PROMISE AND FREEDOM  
THAT COMES FROM  
LIVING IN THE LIGHT  
AND LOVE OF GOD.







# WHAT THE POOR MEAN TO US

## Giving What We Have Been Given

In our Vineyard *Core Values* statement we say:

"We lean toward the lost, the poor, the outcast, and the outsider with the compassion of Jesus as sinners whose only standing before God is utterly dependent on the mercy of God. This mercy can only be truly received inasmuch as we are willing to give it away."

In other words, we as a church movement "lean toward" those who are suffering and are weak in society. We do so not because we believe we are better than them, or because we believe we can fix them. We lean toward the poor, the outcast, and the outsider because *we ourselves* have experienced the kindness and mercy of God.

God did not look at each one of us and decide to show us mercy based on whether or not we had gotten ourselves into a mess, or we were blameless because someone else had done something to us. He simply looked on us with *love*, then acted in compassion to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness.

Grateful people, who know the joy of their salvation, tend to be more careful when it comes to judging others. In the Vineyard we seek to be a thankful group of people, so that when we see someone in need our hearts are ready to respond with care rather than judgment. As Jesus said, "He who is forgiven much, loves much" (Luke 7:47). Through our spiritual practices as churches, we want to become people who love much.

## The Poor Are Jesus To Us

What do the poor mean to us? In the profound moment when Jesus said, "... Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40), he was teaching us how to see the poor. We see the poor not as "underprivileged" or "needy," but rather as

"Jesus." Like Mother Theresa, who regularly cared for the poor in Calcutta, India, Vineyard churches generate ministries around the globe that see the poor as Jesus – and are serving them with great dignity.

A story about John Wimber illustrates this tenderness toward the poor. John was known for keeping a bag of basic groceries in the trunk of his car and looking for someone to whom he could give them. He even once said, "Many Christians and Christian leaders have been neutralized by the love of money and materialism. The homage paid to affluence becomes a burden that saps our energy as well as our love for God and other people. Through repentance and the cleansing of forgiveness, we can rid ourselves of this burden and begin to let God transform our value system. Like Jesus and Paul, we can learn to be content with what we have, living modestly in order that we may give liberally to the work of the kingdom and to meet the needs of others."

It is in this spirit that we seek to operate as churches. Because the poor mean much to Jesus, we must seek out those who are the most in need around us. With the resources in our hands, we desire to invest in Good News being shared with the poor – both spiritually and materially.

## Lifting People From Poverty And Injustice

Of course, this will look different in different places. Poverty means many different things in different parts of the world. Vineyard churches exist in these places, and it is part of our genetic code to join Jesus in his mission to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

For this reason you will find Vineyard communities caring for the poor as though caring for themselves, eagerly sharing their resources to help lift people from poverty and injustice.

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EFFORTS!



# HOW CAN WE SERVE THE POOR?

## Getting Involved With The Poor

There is so much injustice in our world today, we can feel paralyzed by the sheer scope of need. Yet if we ignore injustice, and turn our back on the powerless and the poor, the Scripture tells us that something very sad happens. God hears our worship as “noise” until we “...Let justice roll on like a river; righteousness like a never-failing stream” (Amos 5:34).

But how can you and I get involved? Amid the thousands of images of suffering we see on our streets, televisions, phones, and computer screens, how do we choose where we will invest our lives?

Here, the words of Jesus can move us forward: “Give and it will be given to you” (Luke 6:38). In other words, if we just start *giving* – giving time, resources, and energy to those in need – God will both guide us and give us what need to do his will.

Across the Vineyard movement, there are literally hundreds of ways to be involved in caring for those in need. We have ministries that address the sex trafficking industry, poor health and sanitation issues, economic injustice, racial injustice, and issues of spiritual poverty. Vineyard communities are committed to innovating new expressions of ministry for the world’s most vulnerable to get the resources they need.

## Faith Is Spelled R-I-S-K

Many years ago, Carol Wimber used the language of the “haves” and the “have nots” when speaking about the Vineyard’s call to serve the poor. One day, we are the “have,” with food on our table, peace in our home, and provision for our education. On another day, we might be the “have not,” in need of someone to share their resources and influence to help us change the circumstance we are in. The “have nots” need the “haves” for their supply, but the “haves” need the “have nots” to give meaning to the gifts that God has place in their hands.

In your community, either through your local Vineyard church or through a relief organization, there are opportunities to

get beyond your comfort zone and to get involved. For many years, Vineyard churches have spelled faith: “R-I-S-K.” Sometimes we must jump off the diving board before we know if there is water in the pool! Finding God in the midst of a new adventure means diving in and trusting that God will help you as you do.

Our Vineyard history is rich with literally thousands of stories of people who encountered Jesus and his kingdom through someone reaching out to them with care. In Vineyards around the world, we often match people’s life experience with a need. For example, if you are a young woman then perhaps ministering to young women rescued from the sex trafficking industry is a next step for you. If you have known the difficulty of joblessness, it is possible that a great start for you would be to work with the homeless and jobless of your city.

Sharing some of our experiences with others in need can break down invisible barriers, creating supportive relationships. Often, God uses our stories to open the heart of another to Jesus – giving an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to provide for them in ways no one else can.

## Joining The Father Among The Poor

Our desire as a movement is not to ask God to bless what we are doing in our churches, but rather to get involved in what God is already doing. We see God’s heart for the poor, and we see him moving among the weak to bring deliverance and healing through his people.

In fact, many of our churches around the world are building their faith communities *among* the poor, integrating with those in need as neighbors, friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ. Long-term care, job placement, and enrichment paths are set in motion, and those broken by poverty or abuse often rise to become healthy, hopeful, and healing followers of Christ.

Get involved caring for the poor in your local context, with a humble heart to serve. You’ll be amazed at what changes in you as you follow Jesus among the poor.





## REFLECTION

"I have a distinct memory of sitting in my study one day as I was pulling together thoughts and materials related to stepping out on yet another church planting adventure. I was quite excited, feeling that rush of risking faith that these types of pioneering ventures demand, ready to pull together my demographics, cultural analyses and various and sundry cool ideas that I was envisioning for this new emerging community.

In the midst of the swirl of documents, scribbles, ear-tagged books, notes and the latest DVDs – on everything from relevant communication trends to systems and community development – was my Bible. Open.

Staring up at me were the words given to Paul as he was launching on his first foray into church planting and mission. Peter, James and John, considered to be the pillars of the early Church in every regard, agreed that it was time for Paul to step out. To risk. To put his hand to the call on his life to participate in the expanding kingdom of heaven through missional endeavors out into the Gentile world far out of the reach of Jerusalem and Samaria.

Their words of instruction to Paul were there on the page burning not just into my eyes, but into my heart as well.

As Paul would step out he would become the first intentional missionary and church planter in the history of the Church. The gospel had spread to many places of the world through persecution and the dispersion of believers for various reasons. But this was a first. This was important. The key elements of the gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed and modeled.

Pretty big stuff.

The thing Peter, James and John said to Paul was not just gripping my heart, but shifting my thinking. In fact, the more I pondered what I was reading, I began to get somewhat angry as I looked up in my study to see, as Wimber would say, 'words, words, words, words' – so much instruction; teaching; training information about faith; life and the church. I couldn't remember anyone in the midst of all these 'words' telling me what Paul was told.

I was ticked. Why had I never heard this before?

'All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing that I was eager to do all along' (Paul the Apostle, Gal. 2:10).

That's all they asked. Full stop. At the one-year evaluation as to how things at your church are going, there is only one question on the exam. At the two-year point, just one question still. At the 10-year mark, there is just one requirement that cannot be lost in the midst of all the challenges and hurdles of living out faith and building community:

*Did you remember the poor?*

The more I walk this journey in my own life and in the midst of the community of faith I realize that this one simple request is more and more central than I ever dreamed to the understanding of the gospel, the call to follow Christ, and the mission of the Church.

Remember the poor. Don't forget the poor."

-DAVID RUIS

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*DID YOU REMEMBER  
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# BECOMING A COMPASSIONATE PEOPLE

Compassion is a word we often use in the Vineyard to sum up the kind of Christians we want to become. Jesus “had compassion” on the harassed and helpless (Matt. 9:36), and this moves us to want to have compassion in all that we do as churches.

Compassion literally means “to suffer with.” When we learn to “suffer with” those in physical distress, or economic pain, over time we begin to carry God’s heart for the poor. Compassion is learned by doing the work of the kingdom – the work of serving the poor. This takes moving beyond mere sympathy for the poor. Compassion is a motivation of the heart that gets our hands dirty, and causes us to live in a way that is contrary to a world turning its applause toward anyone with celebrity status, wealth, or reputation.

Hear these words from the prophet Isaiah, that reveal a promise from God when we act compassionately in the world he loves:

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice

and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I” (Is. 58:6-9).

We can practice radical hospitality, radical welcome to those in need, just as the early Church did. We can seek out those who are marginalized by society (even by churches) and treat them with dignity and honor. We can see the lost, the poor, the outcast, and the outsider through the loving eyes of Jesus. In fact, we can even see the poor *as* Jesus (Matt. 25:40). When we remember the poor, when we serve the poor – we are serving Christ.



JESUS SEEMED  
PARTICULARLY  
PASSIONATE ABOUT  
CONNECTING  
ACROSS CLASS LINES,  
ADDRESSING THE  
PHYSICAL NEEDS OF  
THE POOR, AND EVEN  
COMMANDING HIS  
FOLLOWERS TO ENSURE  
THAT POOR PEOPLE ARE  
CENTRAL TO THE LIFE OF  
THE COMMUNITY.





## REFLECTION

"The other day I was talking to a friend on the street while walking home from work. A guy came up to us, 'Hey, can I get a couple bucks?' Sound familiar? 'You know, friend, I can't give you any money, but if you're hungry and you show up at our church tomorrow, we'll hook you up with some food. I promise. It's just up the street.'

A number of years ago God convicted me about serving the poor. Our church is just outside of Detroit so I was overwhelmed with the possibilities, until I sensed the Lord saying, 'Do something! Start somewhere!' I could do that. I landed on the idea of passing out groceries at a local mobile home community. I shared my idea with church members that I thought might be interested. I gathered a small team and we got to work.

We called it *The Grocery Giveaway*. Short on poetry, I know. We did what we could do – once a month we'd fill up between 15-20 bags of groceries, then give them away door to door, offering to pray for anyone that had a need. Soon we had members of the neighborhood joining us. I handed the ministry over to another leader and it grew. Eventually we had a small group meeting onsite and we had favor with the property owners; we were seen as a community resource for the whole park.

A few years later our church had grown and moved to an actual church building! Now we house a food pantry, led by a dynamic mother of four who

owns her own business, and staffed by a team of dedicated volunteers. We help over 100 families with twice monthly services. We get our food from personal donations, area food banks, and more. We've recently added two new components.

First, we've converted some unused space on our property into a garden where we grow fresh vegetables for the pantry. We've networked with local businesses to come alongside church members to help care for and maintain portions of the garden. Local food for local families. Second, we've partnered with the local career center for one of their employment managers to visit the pantry and talk with interested guests about job openings in the area. We're hoping to give them a hand up too.

We also care for our homeless neighbors. Our church houses an overnight shelter for about 70 men and women for the first 12 days of each year. We provide a hot meal, warm smiles and a safe place to sleep, in partnership with two other local churches and our area Chamber of Commerce. I love seeing everyone using their gifts and building community.

The poor aren't a project. They are our neighbors, our friends. I love meeting a homeless guy on the street corner, or a family in need at my kids' school, and saying, 'If you come by our church, we'll help you out.'"

-JIM POOL

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The Vineyard Movement, since birth, has valued seeing individual Christians experience God in their daily lives. Through spiritual practices such as worship, fellowship, mission, the reading and application of Scripture, soul care, family care, healing of the broken, cultural influence, the compassionate ministry of the Holy Spirit, and loving our neighbors, the Vineyard community of churches seeks to be intentional about nurturing the lives of those who call us their family.

To find out more about the Vineyard, visit [www.vineyardusa.org](http://www.vineyardusa.org).  
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