



#2: Loving and Sharing | Joe Wittwer | October 17, 2010

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat, perhaps offering coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray, or invite someone to pray, and open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group; 5-10 minutes.)

Introduction: Each of us can “fill the hole in our gospel” by engaging the poor in Jesus’ name in four ways: we can pray, give, love and serve. We are currently talking about filling the hole in our gospel. Last year, we read together Rich Stearns’ book, *The Hole in Our Gospel* in which Stearns contends that the hole in our gospel is that we have failed to take seriously God’s command to care for the poor. So, how can we fill the hole in our gospel? It’s easy to give some money; it’s hard to truly lift people out of poverty. We all know the saying, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Giving a man a fish is relief; there is a time to do that—when a man is dying of starvation, give him a fish. But then we have move from relief to rehabilitation to development. We have to teach him to fish. We have to be smart about helping the poor if we really want to help them and not hurt them. The book *When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty without Hurting the Poor* by Corbett and Fikkert is reshaping our church’s thinking about our efforts to engage the poor both locally and internationally. We want to be smart about what we’re doing so that we make a lasting difference, so that we really help people instead of just doing something that makes us feel good, but leaves them as stuck as ever. Pray and give: we talked about those last week. Today, we’re talking about loving and serving. Let’s dive in.

1. **Love: poverty is the result of broken relationships.**

Our motto here at Life Center is “Loving God, loving people.” This motto summarizes what we’re about. We think this is the most important thing we can do: love God and love people as we were directed in Jesus’ great command. [Read **Matthew 22:35-40** together now.] When you get to the heart of what Jesus is saying, life is fundamentally about relationships; poverty is also fundamentally about relationships. This is one of the main insights of this book, *When Helping Hurts*. In the 1990’s, the World Bank surveyed more than 60,000 poor people in sixty low-income countries, asking, “What is poverty?” The poor answered the question very differently than we might. They mentioned the lack of material things, but they also talked in terms of shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression and isolation. They used words that describe relationships with God, self and others. Our sin, both collectively and individually, has broken each of these relationships. In this sense, each of us is poor. Each of us suffers from the poverty of broken relationships. Jesus indicated this in the Beatitudes when he said in **Matthew 5:3**, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.*” The first step to blessedness, to happiness is realizing our spiritual poverty, that our relationship with God is broken and that we desperately need to be made right with God. If life is about relationships, and if sin has broken our relationships, then all of us are poor. It is important to remember this when we try to alleviate material poverty. It is not the rich helping the poor; it is the poor helping the poor. We are all poor, just in different ways. Someone said that evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. It is one sinner telling another sinner where to find forgiveness. In the same way, poverty alleviation is one poor person helping another poor person. In their book, Corbett and Fikkert write, “One of the major premises of this book is that until we embrace our mutual brokenness, our work with low-income people is likely to do far more harm than good.” We assume we know what to do to “save” poor people. Without ever intending to, we treat them as a project, rather than people. When we ignore the

relationships and address only the material needs, we end up hurting both them and us. Poverty is fundamentally relational; it is the result of broken relationships with God, self, others and the rest of creation. So what does this mean for us? It means that the first and best thing we can do is to love others. Really love them. Take the time to get know them, listen to them, care about them personally. Love them! It is all about the relationships. As “can-do Americans”, we want to solve problems, fix things, and do something! But unless we build relationships, we will do the wrong things, or do the right thing the wrong way. Just as winning people to Christ begins with a relationship, so helping the poor begins with building a relationship. It is all about the relationships. Love...and serve.

2. Serve: use your gifts to work with those in need.

We can all pray. We can all give. We can all love. We can all serve. We may not have much money to give, but we have time and we have talents that we can put to work. Each of us is called to serve others. **1 Peter 4:10** tells us, *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”* Here is a big learning when it comes to serving the poor. We should never do for them what they can do for themselves. We need to love them, build relationships and ask them what they need and how we can help. Then we need to serve *with* them, not do to them or for them. Our service must be as their partners, not as their superiors. When we show up and tell the poor what we are going to do for them, and then do it, that is very degrading and disempowering. Instead, we need to love, listen and learn, and then serve with them in the ways they have identified. We want this same kind of thinking to inform our local service. Whenever possible, we want to serve *with* people, rather than just doing it for them. And by serving with them, we further build the relationship.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. Spend some time sharing with the group how you are engaged with the poor locally and internationally. (Do you sponsor a child? Do you volunteer with an organization or serve in some other way in the community?) Where has God given you talents and passion to serve others? Are you engaged in loving and serving others?
2. Pastor Joe shared that life is about relationships and sin has broken our relationships with God and others; so, we are all poor. How does seeing yourself in this way make a difference in the way you might approach poverty in those around you? Why is it important for all of us to “embrace our mutual brokenness” as we take steps toward alleviating poverty?
3. As you seek to fill “the hole in our gospel,” how can you build relationships with the people you want to help?
4. What are your gifts? (If you’re having trouble seeing how you are gifted, ask the others in your group what they think about your gifts.) How are you using your gifts in service? What other ways might you use your gifts to engage the poor locally and internationally?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

Take up the challenge: pray, give, love and serve. Go to www.lifecenter.net and click on the outreach tab and explore our partnerships, locally and globally. Find something that floats your boat, and then get involved and serve the poor in Jesus’ name.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4; 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for the amazing gift he gave us in the sacrifice of His Son for our sins.
- Ask God to provide for the poor in our community and around the world and to help you be an avenue of that provision.
- Bring any other praises or concerns to God.