Lesson on Helping the Poor & Needy

1.) Opening Prayer

2.) The Poor and Needy
Most books of the Bible speak about helping the poor and needy. God doesn't expect us to eliminate poverty; however, we are not to neglect the poor - which would be sin.

2A) What Jesus teaches about our responsibility to help the poor

**Read: Mark 14:7A (NLT)** You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to.

How does God view the poor? Did He plan for poverty? The poor are part of God's design and purpose for this world.

**Read: Luke 6:20 (NLT)** Then Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "God blesses you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours.

What did Jesus mean in this statement? Money hinders the rich from accepting salvation. See next scripture.

**Read: Luke 18:21 (NLT)** The man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young." 22 When Jesus heard his answer, he said, "There is still one thing you haven't done. Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 23 But when the man heard this he became very sad, for he was very rich.

What does this indicate about wealthy people? It shows it is our responsibility to help the poor in some manner.

**Read: Luke 14:12-14 (NLT)** 12 Then he turned to his host. "When you put on a luncheon or a banquet," he said, "don't invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will invite you back, and that will be your only reward. 13 Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14 Then at the resurrection of the righteous, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you."

Explain this directive taught by Jesus. Any suggestions on how to accomplish this?

2B) What are the most common excuses for not helping the poor and needy?

** They don't deserve help. They got themselves into poverty; let them get themselves out.
** God's call to help the poor applies for a different or another time.
** I don't know anyone like this.
** I have my own needs.
** Any amount I give will be wasted, stolen or spent foolishly.
** The poor will never end up with my contribution.
** I may become a victim myself.
**I don't know where to start nor have the time to figure this out.**
**My little bit won't make any difference.**

2C) **What does God think of these excuses?**

**Read:** Prov. 28:27 (NLT) *Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to poverty will be cursed.*

**Read:** Deut. 15:10 (NLT) *Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do.*

**Read:** James 2:5-7 (NLT) *Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? (yes!) Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? (yes!) 6 But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? (yes!) 7 Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear? (yes!) (yes!) and (yes!)*

**What does God promise when we help the poor?** God will bless us in the future.

2D) **Deeper Insight**

Always be prepared while standing in the grocery check-out line to hand over money to mothers who are short of cash.
Or, help people financially at church; such as, widows, fatherless children, full-time Christian workers, family members, holiday offerings, etc.
Or, Invite the poor to your house for dinner on weekends or the holidays.

**More suggestions:** Are you partial to the "haves" while ignoring the "have not's"? Are you able to do humble tasks for others? Do you welcome conversation with unattractive, non-prestigious people? Are you willing to befriend newcomers and entry level people? Or do you relate only to those who will help you get ahead?

3.) **God Blesses Our Obedience**

The following is an illustration of how God blesses because of our immediate obedience to His various commandments.

**Background information:**
The army of Babylon (currently the Baghdad, Iraq area) destroyed Jerusalem; as well as, Israel's beautiful Temple. Most Jews where made slaves and taken to Babylon as exiles for approximately 70 years. King Cyrus allowed them to return to Israel to rebuild their Temple and establish new homes. The first 10 years were difficult because foreigners had taken over their former farms. These foreigners hindered rebuilding the Temple wall and all work ceased for the next 10 years while they built homes. God decided it was time to restart building His Temple and he gave a message to the prophet Haggai.

3A) **Haggai 1:3-6 (NLT)** 3 Then the Lord sent this message through the prophet Haggai: 4 "Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? 5 This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Look at what's happening to you! 6 You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!"

**What was happening to Israel? Why?** The harder the people worked for themselves, the less they had because they ignored their spiritual lives. This same thing happens to us.
**What conclusion can be reached concerning God?** If we put God first, He will provide for our deepest needs. If we put Him in any other place, all our efforts will be futile. Caring only for your physical needs while ignoring your relationship with God will lead to confusion and ruin.

**Do we react in the same manner to our children by holding back gifts?** No! we normally keep spoiling them despite their lack of respect and honor towards us.

<This was their original warning from God and spoken by Moses.>

Deut. 28:38-42 (NLT) 38 "You will plant much but harvest little, for locusts will eat your crops. 39 You will plant vineyards and care for them, but you will not drink the wine or eat the grapes, for worms will destroy the vines. 40 You will grow olive trees throughout your land, but you will never use the olive oil, for the fruit will drop before it ripens. 41 You will have sons and daughters, but you will lose them, for they will be led away into captivity. 42 Swarms of insects will destroy your trees and crops.

**God's Warning:** Because the people did not put God first in their lives, their work was not fruitful or productive, material possessions did not satisfy, and families were torn apart. While they concentrated on building and beautifying their own homes; God was withholding His blessing. The HOME is central to a person feeling secure. Just notice the homes being destroyed in America by God via weather, financial disaster, fires, mud slides, ice, snow, floods, etc. Wake up America! (Deut 28:38-42)

**What was the people's reaction to God's message?** The people started rebuilding the Temple wall foundation within 23 days! Rarely did the prophet's message produce a quick response but this one did. How often do we leave church after hearing a sermon and respond quickly by making needed spiritual changes?

3B) **God's Immediate Blessing**

**Read:** Haggai 1:3-6 (NLT) 18 “Think about this eighteenth day of December, the day when the foundation of the Lord’s Temple was laid. Think carefully. 19 I am giving you a promise now while the seed is still in the barn. You have not yet harvested your grain, and your grapevines, fig trees, pomegranates, and olive trees have not yet produced their crops. But from this day onward I will bless you.”

**What did God promise the people?** This was God's blessing because of their swift reaction to His message. God did not wait for the project to be completed. God often sends his encouragement and approval with our first few obedient steps.

4.) **What are you going to do with this information?**

God views all people equally and if He favors anyone it is the poor and powerless. Most needy people can't help their status or situation in the world. Only by the grace of God we aren't in their situation. Pray for God to point out these people to you and show compassion for them.

Each time we show compassion, our character is strengthened and God gives us more in return. Remember: **He is eager to bless us when we act out of obedience to His commandments!!!** Are you a generous person to the poor and needy?