

# HOPE

## FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY

# STUDY GUIDE

### CHAPTER 3

#### Poor Children: The Walking Wounded

Jennifer Coulter Stapleton

*Passage for meditation:*

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?’ . . . And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

—Matthew 25:37-38, 40

*Quote for consideration:*

Jesus’ parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) . . . speaks about the arrogance of powerlessness—or, more accurately, the arrogance of *pretending* to be powerless, when in fact we can use what the Master has entrusted to us to do his work. . . . This has been our great failure as U.S. Christians.

—Arthur Simon, *Bread for the World* (New York: Paulist, 1975), 164

**Q:** Do you think of yourself as powerful? Why or why not? What has the Master entrusted to you to use in response to the needs outlined in this chapter?

*Questions for reflection:*

1. The chapter describes four areas of negative impact of poverty on children: physical, emotional, social, and educational. Which of these areas represents the greatest or most visible need in your community?
2. How does this chapter shed light on why the problems of poverty often become cyclic, passed down from generation to generation?
3. The chapter calls Christians to pray, advocate, and serve on behalf of poor children. How is each form of involvement incomplete without the others? Which form(s) of response are most emphasized—and most neglected—in your personal and congregational life?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- To further explore how “lack of money compounds an intricate web of other social conditions” (p. 18), see Children’s Defense Fund, *Wasting America’s Future* (Boston: Beacon, 1994); and Susan E. Mayer, *What Money Can’t Buy: Family Income and Children’s Life Chances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- The online journal *The Future of Children* ([www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org)) publishes topical issues that cover in depth the range of concerns addressed in this chapter.

Contact:

- Bread for the World ([www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org), 800-822-7323) is a national Christian citizens’ movement against hunger, whose members lobby government for public policies that address the root causes of hunger and poverty in the United States and overseas. Bread for the World provides resources to learn about poverty and to engage congregations in work on behalf of hungry children and families.

Act:

- Pray for children using Marian Wright Edelman, *Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditations on Loving and Working for Children* (Boston: Beacon Hill, 1995).
- Advocate for children by linking with advocacy organizations such as Bread for the World ([www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)), Call to Renewal ([www.calltorenewal.org](http://www.calltorenewal.org)) or Children’s Defense Fund ([www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)). See *Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches*, Shannon Daley and Kathleen Guy (New York: Friendship Press and Children’s Defense Fund, 1994).
- Serve children by volunteering for a church-sponsored ministry or nonprofit; find a local ministry or become a virtual volunteer through [www.christianvolunteering.org](http://www.christianvolunteering.org), or connect with a national organization that serves children through [www.putyourfaithinaction.org](http://www.putyourfaithinaction.org).

## CHAPTER 4

# Suffer the Children: The Impact of Poverty on America's Youth

Robert Odom

*Passage for meditation:*

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

—1 John 3:17-18

*Quote for consideration:*

Too many people simply do not understand or are unwilling to admit that poverty in the United States is both widespread and serious. Many families are hungry, homeless and hopeless. It is time for us to open our minds and our hearts. As my mother often said, "People would do better if they knew better."

—Robert Odom, *Suffer the Children* (Minneapolis: Love INC, 2006), 3

**Q. Do you agree that ignorance of the needs is what keeps people from doing better by children? Why or why not? Now that this chapter has shown you a glimpse into the painful lives of poor children, how will this knowledge lead you to love "in truth and action"?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Which of the quotes from the school principals most touched or troubled you? If you could meet the children in these stories, what would you like to do or say in response?
2. Odom notes that children need more than material goods to heal the wounds of poverty; they need the "life-changing message" of the power of God's love. What do you believe are appropriate ways to share God's love with vulnerable children? How can Christians be open about their faith while remaining sensitive to the danger of manipulating children's fragile spirits?
3. If you were on staff at the schools where these stories come from, dealing with the pain and needs of these troubled children day after day, what kind of personal toll do you imagine this would take on you? Do you know a teacher, social worker, or other professional working with at-risk children who could use your support?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- To better understand how poverty affects children's self-image, see Loretta J. Brunious, *Constructing Social Reality: Self-Portraits of Black Children Living in Poverty* (New York:

Routledge, 1998).

■ Become informed about the plight of the most vulnerable children in America: “Homeless Families with Children,” NCH Fact Sheet #12, available from the National Coalition for the Homeless ([www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/families.pdf](http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/families.pdf)). To view homelessness from a child’s point of view, read Judith Berck, ed., *No Place to Be: Voices of Homeless Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

Contact:

■ The mission of Love In the Name of Christ (800-777-5277, [www.loveinc.org](http://www.loveinc.org)) is to mobilize the church to transform lives and communities “In the Name of Christ.” Love INC trains local affiliates, which coordinate volunteers and donations in a network of churches and community-based organizations. Love INC coordinates volunteers and resources in a network of churches and community-based organizations in order to help the poor. By harnessing the resources and talents of Christians across denominations, Love INC affiliates serve more than one million people in need each year and equip people to make lasting changes in their lives.

■ World Vision’s U.S. Programs (888-511-6548, [www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org)) provide resources for churches and community groups to serve children and families. Programs include Vision Youth, which trains church-based outreach workers to mentor at-risk youth and tutor struggling students in their own neighborhoods.

Act:

■ Give poor children the opportunity to share their own stories through the arts. For examples of empowering art programs, see DrawBridge ([www.drawbridge.org](http://www.drawbridge.org)), the Goodlands Photography Project ([www.goodlands.org](http://www.goodlands.org)), and Neighborhood Ministries Art Center ([www.neighborhoodministries.org](http://www.neighborhoodministries.org)).

■ Serve as a positive influence in the life of a poor child by becoming a mentor. See the mentoring organizations profiled on pages 53–56 and 149–152 in *Hope for Children in Poverty*.<sup>1</sup>

■ Form a study group to learn more about poverty. Check out the educational resources available from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development ([www.povertyusa.org](http://www.povertyusa.org)), the “Just Neighbors” multimedia curriculum available from Family Promise ([www.nihn.org](http://www.nihn.org)), or the online course “Poverty 101” ([www.urbanministry.org](http://www.urbanministry.org)). See also Bill Ehlig and Ruby Payne, *What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty* (Highlands, TX: Aha! Process, 1999).

Note

1. Unless otherwise noted, page references are for *Hope for Children in Poverty*, edited by Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Unruh (Judson Press, 2007).

## CHAPTER 5

# Children of Working Parents Growing Up in Poverty

Charon Hribar and Paul Chapman

*Passage for meditation:*

They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat;  
. . . my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.  
They shall not labor in vain,  
or bear children for calamity;  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—  
and their descendants as well.  
—Isaiah 65:21-23

*Quote for consideration:*

“Ask any politician to live off my budget. Live off my minimum wage job and just a little bit of food stamps—how can he do it? I bet he couldn’t. I’d like him to try it for one month. Come home from work, cook dinner, wash clothes, do everything, get up and go to work the next day, and then find you don’t have enough money to pay for everything you need.”  
—Quote from single working mother in Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997), 149

**Q:** How would your life be different if your household lived on an annual income of \$10,712 (current minimum wage)? Or even \$17,170, the poverty line for a family of three in 2007? See the exercise in living at the poverty level in Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 19.

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Does the description in this chapter of the struggles of low-wage workers affect your perception of poor families? The authors assert “the reality that hard work is not a guarantee for success and that poverty is not necessarily the product of laziness or lack of determination.” Do you agree? Compare Proverbs 28:19 and Proverbs 13:23.
2. What are some practical implications of the biblical material related to work for how employers today should treat their workers? Try to identify two or three specific guidelines that would apply to contemporary businesses. Does your work setting comply with the biblical standard? If not, is there anything you can do about it?
3. What policies do you think could best empower working poor families to be economically self-sufficient, while promoting a healthy balance of work and parenting? Consider these

policy options: substantial wage supplements (e.g., the Earned Income Tax Credit), high-quality job training programs, child care subsidies, affordable health care benefits, raise in minimum wage, food stamps, refundable child tax credits, transportation assistance. What active steps can you take to promote the set of policies you believe to be most necessary?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

In addition to the books listed in the endnotes, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001).

Contact:

- Interfaith Worker Justice is a network that educates and mobilizes the religious community in the United States on campaigns to improve wages, benefits and conditions for low-wage workers (773-728-8400; [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)).
- The Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign is a nonpartisan coalition of faith, community, labor and business organizations committed to the principle: “A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it” (513-621-4336, [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org)).
- Living Wage Resource Center of ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) provides information, action steps, and links to promote living wages (202-547-2500, [natacorncam@acorn.org](mailto:natacorncam@acorn.org), [www.livingwagecampaign.org](http://www.livingwagecampaign.org)).

Act:

- Research the self-sufficiency standard for your state at [www.sixstrategies.org](http://www.sixstrategies.org) (includes information for most but not all states) by following the Topics link to State Projects; follow the link to “Six Strategies” for a comprehensive proposal for lifting working families out of poverty.
- One simple ministry is to prepare a list of people in the church willing to provide back-up child care for emergency situations—snow days, children sent home sick from school, a snafu with the regular child care provider—so low-wage parents do not have to miss a day’s income to stay home with their children. Work with the local welfare office to make this service available to working families.
- Consider starting a child care or after-school program at your church to serve the children of low-wage workers.

## CHAPTER 6

# Empowering Children through Effective Education

Delia Stafford and Vicky Dill

*Passage for meditation:*

Train children in the right way,  
and when old, they will not stray.  
—Proverbs 22:6

*Quote for consideration:*

The mood in Miss Reistetter's class is not as happy as on other days because she's told the children that she won't be teaching here next year. She's just been offered a position in the suburbs of New Jersey, where she lives. . . . She's only one of dozens of good teachers I have met in urban districts like Chicago and New York who come to love the children that they teach for two or three brief years in inner-city schools, then pack their lesson plans and learning games and poster boards and all the good experience they've gained and all the useful classroom methods they have mastered after the initial period of trial-and-mistake, and head off to suburban systems where their talents are rewarded with not only better pay but often far more dignified conditions and they are not asked to dig into their own pockets to buy storybooks and crayons and construction paper for their pupils.

—Jonathan Kozol, *Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope* (New York: Crown, 2000), 301, 302-3

**Q. What kinds of incentives might keep star teachers in schools in poor neighborhoods?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Have you or your children ever been taught by a star teacher? What qualities set him or her apart from other teachers in your experience? Consider sending this star teacher a note of appreciation.
2. Discuss this statement: "For diverse students in poverty the agreed-upon goal of the larger society is to educate them to be happy, compliant losers rather than antisocial ones." What *should* be the goal of education for children in poverty? If our society were committed to making all students winners in the educational system, what would be three specific consequences for students, schools, and communities?
3. Given the many challenges, what do you think motivates star teachers and administrators to persevere in their efforts to help under-resourced youth succeed? How might their commitment and core beliefs set an example for people in other professions with a similar mission to serve children in poverty?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- For more in-depth coverage of the points in this chapter, see Martin Haberman, *Star Teachers: The Ideology and Best Practice of Effective Teachers of Diverse Children and Youth in Poverty* (Houston: Haberman Educational Foundation, Inc., 2005).
- Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities* (reprint ed., New York: Harper Perennial, 1992) is a classic work exposing the shameful condition of public schools serving impoverished neighborhoods.
- Books on educating children in poverty include Ruby Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Highlands, TX: Aha! Process, 1996); Anthony Dallmann-Jones, *Shadow Children: Understanding Education's #1 Problem* (Lancaster, PA: RLD Publications, 2006); and Robert Barr and William Parrett, *The Kids Left Behind: Catching Up the Underachieving Children of Poverty* (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree, 2006).

Contact:

- The Haberman Educational Foundation, Inc. (713-667-6185, [www.habermanfoundation.org](http://www.habermanfoundation.org)) disseminates research and tools for the selection of excellent teachers and principals, particularly in school districts serving students in poverty.
- The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (202-429-2570, [www.nctaf.org](http://www.nctaf.org)) seeks to provide every child with competent, caring, qualified teachers to ensure student success.
- Organizations working to improve public schools, particularly in low-income communities, include the Public Education Network (202-628-7460, [www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org)) and the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (877-277-2744, [www.centerforcsri.org](http://www.centerforcsri.org)).
- The Center for Education Reform (202-822-9000, [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com)) promotes grass-roots advocacy on innovative educational options, including charter schools and school choice.

Act:

- What are specific ways your church or parent group could support the identification, recruitment, selection, and work of star teachers in your local public schools? For example, your church might host a teacher selection training for your school district, partner with a classroom in a low-income district to offer innovative educational opportunities, or “adopt” a star teacher who is effectively reaching students in poverty.
- See other suggested action steps in the sidebar, “Promoting Quality Education for Everyone,” page 66.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Health Care Needs of Poor Children**

**Bruce Jackson**

*Passage for meditation:*

I will rejoice in Jerusalem,  
and delight in my people;  
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,  
or the cry of distress.  
No more shall there be in it  
an infant that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime.  
—Isaiah 65:19-20

*Quote for consideration:*

Medical professionals, rather than lobbying to protect our own interests, must actively lobby to protect the poor. We must reaffirm our commitment as health care professionals to serving the health care needs of all in our society, and champion public policy that seeks this goal, even if it means less income for us. . . . We can use our power and responsibility primarily to benefit ourselves, or we can use it to serve others, especially those least able to protect their own interests. Which we choose will be judged by society and, more importantly, by God.  
—Art Jones, president of Lawndale Christian Health Center, “Health Care Among the Poor: The Vanishing Promise” ([www.lawndale.org/about\\_poor.html](http://www.lawndale.org/about_poor.html))

**Q. What are specific ways that medical practitioners—and other professionals—can serve as an advocate for the interests of poor children, who lack a voice in the health care system?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Who are the professionals, institutions, and other resources that have contributed to the health of your child or to your own health when you were a child? Make a list. What kinds of obstacles would prevent poor families from having access to the health assets you have named? Cross off half the items on the list and imagine what the consequences would be for your child’s health.
2. What Scriptures or other materials would you draw on to encourage children and their families to give attention to preventative care, good nutrition, and a healthy lifestyle?
3. Jesus gave priority to healing in his earthly ministry. (Mark 5:38-43 and Matthew 17:14-18 are examples of stories of Jesus healing children.) For Christians, what are the spiritual dimensions of providing health care to children and their families? What may be the spiritual impact on children of *not* receiving health care?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- For a more in-depth study of health care challenges facing the poor, see Jeanne M. Burger, *Perspectives on Poverty and Health Care* (Indianapolis: Precedent Press, 2005) and Hiram Fitzgerald, Barry Lester, and Barry S Zuckerman, *Children of Poverty: Research, Health, and Policy Issues* (New York: Garland, 1995).
- Wilda Morris, *Stop the Violence: Educating Ourselves to Protect Our Youth* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2001) is an action-oriented resource to protect at-risk youth from being victims and perpetrators of violence.

Contact:

- Christian Community Health Fellowship (CCHF) encourages Christians to serve the poor through health care by providing a journal, conferences, technical assistance, and networking (773-277-2243, [www.cCHF.org](http://www.cCHF.org)).
- March of Dimes ([www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com)) sponsors a program for prenatal education for Hispanic women, called Comenzando Bien, that is well-suited for use by congregations and other faith-based organizations.
- Cover the Uninsured ([www.covertheuninsured.org](http://www.covertheuninsured.org)) provides a detailed report on uninsured children and advocacy resources for the faith community.

Act:

- As suggested in the chapter, volunteer for Habitat for Humanity ([www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org)) to provide children with safe living conditions.
- Contact your elected officials to promote the expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program and Federally Qualified Health Centers.
- As a church, start or partner with a health care program, such as a free health clinic, nutrition program, lay health promotion program (see [www.famhealth.org](http://www.famhealth.org)), parish nursing ministry (see [www.parishnursing.umaryland.edu](http://www.parishnursing.umaryland.edu)), or prenatal care outreach.

**CHAPTER 8**  
**Shattered Bonds:**  
**Poverty, Race, and the Child Welfare System**  
**Dorothy Roberts**

*Passage for meditation:*

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,  
is God in his holy dwelling.  
God sets the lonely in families.  
—Psalm 68:5, NIV

*Quote for consideration:*

Poverty is confused with neglect, historian Linda Gordon explains, because “it often comes packaged with depression and anger, poor nutrition and housekeeping, lack of education and medical care, leaving children alone, exposing children to improper influences.” Raising children in poverty also looks like parental unfitness if you believe that poor people are responsible for their own predicament and are negative role models for their children.  
—Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002), 27

**Q. Are poor parents irresponsible because they are raising children in poverty, or does being poor make it more difficult for parents to act responsibly? Why? In what ways might poverty alone constitute child maltreatment?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. This chapter points to a link between the stress of economic hardship and child maltreatment. What kinds of interventions and services might lessen the risk of child maltreatment in poor families? How can Christians care for abused and neglected children while also extending God’s love to parents in poverty, many of whom were maltreated as children?
2. The author asks, “If black parents are no more likely than others to mistreat their children, how can we explain the racial disparity in the child welfare system’s caseload?” What is your response to this question?
3. The author calls for community-based child welfare policies that emphasize strengthening families rather than separating children from their parents. What are three ways a community (neighbors, churches, schools, businesses, government) could extend support to poor families to prevent the removal of children from their home, or to promote reunification for families in the foster care system?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- For a more in-depth understanding of the weaknesses and racial bias of the child welfare system, see the books cited in the chapter endnotes, especially *The Lost Children of Wilder* and *Disposable Children*. See Duncan Lindsey, *The Welfare of Children* (2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) for a critique of welfare reform's impact on poor children and proposals for changing the system.
- The children of incarcerated parents often end up in the child welfare system. See Cynthia Martone, *Loving Through Bars: Children with Parents in Prison* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2005).

Contact:

- For information on the child welfare system and resources to help protect children and strengthen families, see the Child Welfare Information Gateway ([www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)) and the Child Welfare League of America ([www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)). Also see the reports on Kids Are Waiting ([www.kidsarewaiting.org](http://www.kidsarewaiting.org)), a national campaign to reform foster care.
- One Church, One Child is an adoption initiative that works primarily through minority churches to recruit adoptive parents, in partnership with thirty-two state governments. Search the Web to see if One Church, One Child is active in your state.
- For information and links on foster parenting and adoption, see [www.fostercare.net](http://www.fostercare.net), [www.fosterparents.com](http://www.fosterparents.com), and [www.adoption.com](http://www.adoption.com).

Act:

- Invite a panel of professionals representing the child welfare system, private foster care agencies, and family court to address your church (or even better, a group of churches) on the key issues for child welfare in your community, followed by a discussion of how the church could respond.
- Become a court appointed volunteer advocate for an abused or neglected child through CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) ([www.casenet.org](http://www.casenet.org)).
- Consider becoming an adoptive or foster care parent. Meet some of the children needing loving homes through [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org) and <http://www.childrenawaitingparents.org/home.html>.

## CHAPTER 9

### Children in an Era of Welfare Reform

Sharon Parrott and Arloc Sherman

*Passage for meditation:*

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.  
The LORD watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow.  
—Psalm 146:8-9

*Quote for consideration:*

I never dreamed that I would end up on welfare with three small children 15 years ago. As a pastor's wife, I thought that I would live the rest of my life as a wife and mother . . . . After 10 years of marriage, however, I experienced a traumatic divorce that left me devastated and hopeless. . . . The day I had to apply for welfare and have my picture taken for my I.D. was one of the saddest days of my life. I wondered how on earth I would ever get out of the pit that I found myself in. While I and my family were on welfare, I knew that people in churches wanted to help us. However, I think it was difficult for people to know what to say or do. . . . I know now there are millions of families who are trapped in welfare dependency and need a way out, just as I did. Due to [welfare reform], welfare families are losing their benefits. Many are also losing hope in God and his church.

—Debbie Stafford, preface to Deanna Carlson, *The Welfare of My Neighbor: Living Out Christ's Love for the Poor* (Washington, DC: Family Research Council, 1999), 7

**Q. What set of circumstances might lead your family to apply for welfare? How might being on welfare affect your relationships with friends in your neighborhood and at church?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Which of the facts about the trends following welfare reform surprised you the most? Distressed you the most?
2. Parents receiving welfare are now generally required to work. What are the pros and cons of this policy for the children in these families? What kinds of support could help families promote the well-being of children as parents transition to self-sufficiency through work?
3. How can churches work with or alongside the government to achieve the three goals set out in the last paragraph of this chapter in *Hope for Children in Poverty*, page 102 (support poor children, help hard-to-place welfare recipients find jobs, help low-income workers

advance to better jobs)? What are some unique contributions people of faith could make in these areas?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- For an overview of welfare reform, read the Fact Sheet on Welfare by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ([www.acf.hhs.gov/news/facts/tanf.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/news/facts/tanf.html)), or Mark Greenberg et al., “The 1996 Welfare Law: Key Elements and Reauthorization Issues Affecting Children,” *The Future of Children* vol. 12, no. 1 (winter/spring 2002), ([www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org)).
- For information on “Charitable Choice” and the faith-based initiative, which originated with welfare reform legislation in 1996, see materials available from The Center for Public Justice ([www.cpjustice.org/charitablechoice](http://www.cpjustice.org/charitablechoice)) or the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy ([www.religionandsocialpolicy.org](http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org)). A variety of perspectives are presented in *Welfare Reform and Faith-Based Organizations*, ed. Derek Davis and Barry Hankins (Waco, TX: J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, 1999), and in *Sacred Places, Civic Purposes: Should Government Help Faith Based Charity?* ed. E.J. Dionne Jr. and Ming Hsu Chen (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).
- Because of the strong correlation between single parenting and family poverty (see Robert Rector, Kirk Johnson, Patrick Fagan, and Lauren Noyes, “Increasing Marriage Would Dramatically Reduce Child Poverty,” Center for Data Analysis Report #03-06 (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2003), one of the goals of welfare reform legislation has been to promote healthy marriages. For more information on the Healthy Marriage Initiative, see [www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage). One project sponsored by this initiative is Building Strong Families ([www.buildingstrongfamilies.org](http://www.buildingstrongfamilies.org)), which develops and evaluates programs to help interested unwed parents fulfill their goal of a healthy marriage and a stable family life.

Contact:

- The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (202-408-1080, [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)) provides information on public policy issues affecting low-income families.
- The Economic Success Clearinghouse (formerly the Welfare Information Network, [www.welfareinfo.org](http://www.welfareinfo.org)) connects users with resources on effective policies and programs to help low-income and working poor families.
- The Kensington Welfare Rights Union ([www.kwru.org](http://www.kwru.org)), founded in the wake of welfare cuts, is a multiracial, grassroots organization of welfare recipients, homeless persons, working poor, and others concerned with promoting economic justice. KWRU founded The Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign as a national movement to abolish poverty (see the profile on page 103 in *Hope for Children in Poverty*).

Act:

- Urge your state representatives to support welfare-reform programs that help parents prepare for and find decent-paying jobs, particularly recipients with the greatest barriers to employment.
- Volunteer with or start a ministry serving families on welfare. See Deanna Carlson, *The Welfare of My Neighbor: Living Out Christ’s Love for the Poor* (Washington, DC: Family

Research Council, 1999), with accompanying workbook; and Amy L. Sherman, *Establishing a Church-Based Welfare-to-Work Mentoring Ministry: A Practical “How-To” Manual* (New York: Center for Civic Innovations, n.d.).

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **What Government Can (and Can't Do)**

**Curtis Ramsey-Lucas**

*Passage for meditation:*

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 2:4-5

*Quote for consideration:*

The biblical paradigm calls for an economic order in which all who are able to work enjoy access to appropriate productive resources so they can be creative co-workers with God, create wealth to bless their family and neighbors, and be dignified participating members of their community. For those who cannot care for themselves, the biblical framework demands generous assistance so that everyone has a liberal sufficiency of basic necessities. . . . Governmental action to empower the poor is one way we promote the common good.

—Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 70–71, 73

**Q. How do the government programs outlined in chapter 10 fit into this biblical paradigm for economic life?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. As citizens, we are accustomed to assessing public policies in terms of our own interests. How might it change our view of government to look through the lens of the interests of poor children, seeking Christ's perspective?
2. Do you think that the programs outlined in this chapter have or should have the support of Christians across the political spectrum? Why or why not? How can we talk about government's role in relation to poor children in a way that brings Christians together and magnifies their impact, rather than dividing the church?
3. What do you think government *cannot* do to empower poor children that the church can and should do? How is your church prepared to do this—and what are you prepared to do to help?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

Books that explore the role of government and other segments of society in addressing poverty include Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), with accompanying study guide; and David P. Gushee, ed., *Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); and Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, reprint edition, 2006).

Contact:

- The Children in Poverty initiative of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA, offers a variety of worship, study, and advocacy resources to assist churches and individuals in responding to the needs of children living in poverty ([www.nationalministries.org/CIP](http://www.nationalministries.org/CIP)).
- The Center for Public Justice offers materials on public policy research, civic responsibility, and the role of government from a Christian perspective (410-571-6300, [www.cpjustice.org](http://www.cpjustice.org)).
- Evangelicals for Social Action sponsors the Sider Center on Ministry and Public Policy (610-645-9390, [www.esa-online.org](http://www.esa-online.org)), which equips and challenges Christians to work toward a biblical vision of a just world.

Act:

- Join the Covenant for a New America sponsored by Sojourners/Call to Renewal (202-328-8842, [www.covenantforanewamerica.org](http://www.covenantforanewamerica.org) or [www.calltorenewal.org](http://www.calltorenewal.org)), which includes a commitment to ending child poverty. The covenant lays out a comprehensive strategy for overcoming poverty, including responsibilities at the personal, congregational, local, and national levels.
- Let your vote in local and national elections be guided by the interests of children in poverty.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Jesus' View of Children**

**Wess Stafford with Dean Merrill**

*Passage for meditation:*

The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.  
—Zechariah 8:5

*Quote for consideration:*

I was really angry. I felt like I did something really, really wrong to go through what I did, that

I sinned, that it was some kind of punishment or test from God. But then I would feel guilty, because it could have been worse, like living on the street. I thank God that we didn't have to live on the street, or on a corner, or in a box like a lot of homeless people.

Living in the hotel and the shelter did change how I felt about God, in a way. I feel that there has to be some kind of strength to have helped us get through what we went through. I feel there's a higher being up there that helped us get to where we are now, and blessed us with being healthy and everything. Sometimes I believed less in Him, but I still believed.

—Maria P., age 17, whose family went through spells in a welfare hotel and homeless shelter, in *No Place to Be: Voices of Homeless Children*, edited by Judith Berck (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 117

**Q. How did poverty shape this child's view of God? What kinds of spiritual needs may be faced by children in poverty—particularly those who have lived through traumatic experiences?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Are children as important to your church as they are to Jesus? Consider ways that your church could more fully incorporate the kingdom principle “Children matter.” What adjustments might this require in your theology, programs and priorities?
2. What steps could you take to make your home and your congregation more welcoming to poor children, who often struggle to feel that they belong?
3. As this chapter points out, ministry with children demands time, patience, and a humble spirit. What spiritual disciplines can help prepare you to share Christ's love with children?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- For a more in-depth scriptural analysis of the importance of children in the kingdom of God, see Pamela Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).
- Cheryl Sanders, in her book *Ministry at the Margins* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), suggests how the church can emphasize not just ministry *to* but ministry *by* children and the poor.
- Read about churches that have declared that “children matter” in the downloadable article, “How Externally Focused Churches Minister to Children: The Power of Serving Kids in Your Community,” by Krista Petty (February 20, 2007) ([www.leadnet.org](http://www.leadnet.org)).

Contact:

- The United Methodist Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty (<http://archives.umc.org/initiative/cfagc/checklist.html>) has developed a list of ways that individuals and churches can give priority to the needs of children. See *Community with Children and the Poor: A Guide for Congregational Study* (available from [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com)).

■ The Save America's Youth Yes! program of Here's Life Inner City (212-494-0321, [www.sayyescenters.org](http://www.sayyescenters.org)) trains churches to plant Centers for Youth Development. By ministering holistically, S.A.Y. Yes! Centers help inner-city youth learn about Jesus' love for children and become all that God created them to be.

Act:

- Do a simple act of kindness for a child, cultivating the attitude that you are serving Christ.
- Observe a Children's Sabbath, organized by Children's Defense Fund ([www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)). Every October, churches can participate in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths to encourage prayer, education, and service to help children and families in poverty (see the ministry profile on p. 95).
- Consider how you might reach out to include disadvantaged children in some of the activities for children that you already do as a family, neighborhood or congregation.

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Why and How Christians Should Care for Poor Children**

**Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Unruh**

*Passage for meditation:*

Rachel is weeping for her children;  
she refuses to be comforted for her children,  
because they are no more.

Thus says the LORD:

Keep your voice from weeping,  
and your eyes from tears;

for there is a reward for your work, says the LORD:

[the children] shall come back from the land of the enemy;  
there is hope for your future,  
says the LORD.

—Jeremiah 31:15-17

*Quote for consideration:*

Where are our Nehemiahs who will let God dream his dreams in them? . . . “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2). I challenge you to join us in praying for workers for the

harvest. And as you pray, do not let your prayer be a substitute for action; rather, pray “Lord, what would you have me to do?”

—John M. Perkins, *Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing It Together and Doing It Right* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 70, 71

**Q. How willing are you to pray to be a worker in God’s harvest of hope for children in poverty—and then to act on God’s answer?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Which of the points in this chapter were new, surprising, inspiring, or challenging to you?
2. This chapter describes seven pathways of action in response to poverty. Which of these have you put into practice? Which are practiced regularly by your church? Which might be a natural next step for ministry? Are there any forms of action that you or your congregation would *not* feel comfortable supporting? Why?
3. Jesus taught his disciples by word and example and then affirmed, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (John 13:17; see also Matthew 7:24-27). How do you plan to act on what you know about the biblical response to child poverty? See Appendix B for tools to help plan personal and congregational action.

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- Bible study resources on poverty include Cassandra Carkuff Williams, *Children, Poverty and the Bible* (Valley Forge: National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA, 2006; see [www.nationalministries.org/CIP](http://www.nationalministries.org/CIP)); *Justice Now!* (Chicago: Christian Community Development, 1992); Amy Sheridan, *Sharing God’s Heart for the Poor: Meditations for Worship, Prayer and Service* (Charlottesville, VA: Trinity Presbyterian Church, 1999). Ronald Sider, ed., *For They Shall Be Fed: Readings and Prayers for a Just World* (Waco, TX: W Publishing Group, 1997); and Reg Parks, *Compassion by Command*, video curriculum with study guides (Here’s Life Inner City, 2002; see [www.compassionbycommand.com](http://www.compassionbycommand.com)).
- Browse downloadable articles on biblical principles of ministry in Evangelicals for Social Action’s Ministry Resource Center ([www.esa-online.org](http://www.esa-online.org)).

Contact:

For a more in-depth biblical perspective on understanding poverty and restoring healthy communities, consider training opportunities:

- Disciple Nations Alliance ([www.disciplenations.org](http://www.disciplenations.org)) offers an online course on the biblical role of churches in community transformation.
- The Chalmers Center for Economic Development ([www.chalmers.org](http://www.chalmers.org)) offers distance learning courses on church-centered, holistic economic development.
- Partners in Urban Transformation ([www.piut.org](http://www.piut.org)) conducts on-site training events on biblical foundations for ministry and how churches can participate in social change.
- JustFaith ([www.justfaith.org](http://www.justfaith.org)) provides a comprehensive thirty-week curriculum on faith and compassion, along with a follow-up course on skills for parish social ministry.

Act:

- Start a Bible study on Christian responses to poverty, using one of the above resources or drawing on a topical reference tool to cover verses on poverty, compassion, and justice. Or examine a particular pressing aspect of children's needs in your community (family dysfunction, education, health) from a holistic perspective, searching what the Bible has to say about how the church might respond.
- Launch a Faith in Action campaign in your congregation, which integrates Bible studies on compassion with individual and church-wide steps of service ([putyourfaithinaction.org](http://putyourfaithinaction.org)).

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **Children in the Early Church**

**James Riley Estep Jr.**

*Passage for meditation:*

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.  
—James 1:27

*Quote for consideration:*

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the character mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books.  
—C. S. Lewis, Introduction, *The Incarnation of the Word of God: Being the Treatise of St. Athanasius* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 6–7

**Q: According to this quote, why is it helpful to seek the perspective of scholars in the ante-Nicene period (the two hundred years between the close of the New Testament and the adoption of the Nicene Creed in the early church) on the concerns of poor children?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. How do the status and problems faced by children in our day compare with the time of the early church? Identify one or two main similarities and differences.
2. The chapter discusses how violence against children was grounded in Roman law and culture. In what ways do law and culture in our society devalue children, particularly children in poverty?
3. Who are the widows and orphans in your community? Whose responsibility is it to see that they are cared for in body and spirit? What can the church today learn from the list of obligations for caring for orphans specified in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (see page 146)?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) examines the church's perspective on and ministry with children throughout Christian history.
- Amy Sherman, *The ABCs of Community Ministry: A Curriculum for Congregations* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2002) describes lessons from the early church on Christian charity.

Contact:

- Websites with resources and links on protecting children from violence include [www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org) and [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org).
- Presbyterians Pro-Life offers resources for churches to promote alternatives to abortion ([www.ppl.org/resource.html](http://www.ppl.org/resource.html)).

Act:

- Research safe haven laws that create legal opportunities for parents to anonymously abandon their children to the care of the state (see Mary Wiltenburg, "Safe Haven," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 24, 2003, [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)). How could your church be a loving influence in the lives of abandoned babies?
- Volunteer for a crisis pregnancy center or new parent program that encourages parents to allow their babies to live and teaches them to help their children thrive.

## **CHAPTER 15**

### **Gifts from Ministry with the Poor**

**Amy L. Sherman**

*Passage for meditation:*

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us. . . . You glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing.

—2 Corinthians 9:11, 13

*Quote for consideration:*

Caring with vulnerable children is a means of grace, a vehicle through which God makes God's self known to us and to them. In their care we experience grace, the movement of God in our lives that allows us to give to and receive from others. We commit ourselves to love. . . . This mysterious meeting of God in the most vulnerable of children and in ourselves moves us to give thanks.

—Pamela Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 13.

**Q. Why do we need God’s grace in order to give to, receive from, and meet God in vulnerable children? What holds us back from committing ourselves to love?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Have you ever been surprised by a blessing from someone you thought you were serving? Did this experience change your perception of the person? Does it change your perspective on ministry with poor children to think of them as a source of blessing?
2. Which of the gifts described by Sherman has your church experienced in ministry with the poor? Which do you think your church most needs to experience?
3. Has your church been “guilty of a cheap benevolence that wants only to help the poor but isn’t willing to know them”? How could your church’s ministries move toward a more authentic compassion, meaning literally, “suffering alongside” children in need?

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- For more on the theme of how Christians can bless and be blessed by the poor, see Amy L. Sherman, *Restorers of Hope* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997).
- The *Communities First* curriculum by Jay Van Groningen (Grand Rapids: CRWRC, 2005) provides practical guidance on asset-based ministry, an approach to serving with the poor that values their gifts and insights.

Contact:

- The FASTEN (Faith and Service Technical Education Network) website, [www.fastennetwork.org](http://www.fastennetwork.org), offers a wealth of resources on developing church-based community ministries, including a research report on “Connecting Faith to Service.”
- Attend the Christian Community Development Association’s annual conference ([www.cdda.org](http://www.cdda.org)) or Leadership Network’s Externally Focused Church Conference ([www.externallyfocusedconference.com](http://www.externallyfocusedconference.com)) to connect with other Christians committed to serving with those in need and to gather ideas for effective ministries.

Act:

- Visit a church-based ministry working with poor children. Ask staff, “What impact has working with this ministry had on volunteers and on the congregation as a whole? What have you learned from the children? How has serving them enlarged your faith?”
- Make a personal connection with a child in poverty and his or her family, through a church or community ministry that meets basic needs. Look for ways that the relationship can develop into “one of mutual appreciation and respect.”

## **MINISTRY PROFILES**

### **Making a Difference for Children in Poverty**

*Passage for meditation:*

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and release to the prisoners;  
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn. . . .  
They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.  
—Isaiah 61:1-2, 4

*Quote for consideration:*

Huge accomplishments start with small steps. Effective outreach begins with one faithful visionary. . . . *Your* church can proclaim the Good News, comfort the afflicted, build up the cities, and repair the cyclic devastations of broken communities. If you are willing in obedience and trust to take the first small step—and then the next and the next—God will take care of the big picture.

—Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 311, 314

**Q. What is that one small step that God is calling you to make in obedience and trust?**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Which ministry profiles seem most relevant to your church, neighborhood, and personal circumstances? Can you envision any of these ministries being replicated in your context?
2. “Change begins with people standing together to say, ‘Enough’” (page xxviii). From what you’ve read in the companion book to this study guide or from your own encounters with children in poverty, what makes you want to cry, “Enough”? Who else do you know who could stand with you to work for change?
3. Drawing on the case studies and the key ministry principles throughout the book, develop a list of five specific qualities or innovations that you would seek to incorporate in your own or your church’s ministry with children in poverty.

*Resources for information and action:*

Read:

- Good collections of ministry profiles include Robert Carle and Louis Decaro Jr., *Signs of Hope in the City: Ministries of Community Renewal* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1997); Barbara Elliott, *Street Saints: Renewing America's Cities* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2004); and John Fuder, ed., *A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), Nile Harper, *Urban Churches, Vital Signs: Beyond Charity Toward Justice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); and Ronald J. Sider, *Cup of Water, Bread of Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).
- View online ministry profiles on the websites for the Center on Faith in Communities ([www.centeronfic.org](http://www.centeronfic.org)) and the Faith in Action initiative of World Vision ([www.putyourfaithinaction.org](http://www.putyourfaithinaction.org)).
- See the list of books under “Mobilizing the Church to Respond to Poverty” in Appendix A, “Resources for Information and Action (see pages 160–163).”

Contact:

- The organizations listed in Appendix A, “Resources for Information and Action” can connect churches with information, ministry tools, training opportunities, and networks to develop effective outreach with or on behalf of poor children.
- If you are interested in replicating a particular program, most of the profiles provide contact information to allow you to follow up with ministry leaders for more information.

Act:

- Research the state of child well-being in your neighborhood, city and state. View statistical reports available from the U.S. Census Bureau ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)) and other organizations such as Kids Count ([www.kidscount.org/census](http://www.kidscount.org/census)), the National Center for Children in Poverty ([www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org)), and the Forum on Child and Family Statistics ([www.childstats.gov](http://www.childstats.gov)); interview local officials, school administrators and service providers in your area; keep a file of local media stories relating to poverty.
- Find or develop a directory of nonprofits and church-sponsored programs serving poor children and their families in your area. To find agencies working with youth, contact the public schools, police department, local child welfare office, United Way, and organizations like the YMCA or Boys and Girls Club. Bring a group together on a learning tour of these programs.
- Launch your own response to children in poverty! Use the ministry planning tools in Appendix B to help you identify ministry options that are relevant, practical, and timely for your context.
- The CD-ROM *Becoming a Church That Makes a Difference: Ventures in Holistic Ministry* by Heidi Unruh and Phil Olson (Wynnewood, PA: Network 9:35, 2006) provides a more comprehensive set of tools to help churches identify a direction for compassion ministry, develop a plan for a ministry, and equip the congregation to support the ministry ([www.network935.org](http://www.network935.org)).