

POVERTY

Poverty is a growing problem and has been part of mankind for thousands of years and will be with us till the end of time. God gave us in the Church the task to take care of the poor and the destitute. It is so that God expects governments to rule justly and to care for the poor. However it is not, in the first place, the State's responsibility to care for the poor. When for example, we read the book of Proverbs, it is quite clear how God thinks about the poor and what His instructions are to Believers and non-Believers. However, taking care of the poor is primarily the responsibility of the Church.

Poverty has an incredibly degrading effect on people's lives. It often leads to total inferiority, a beggar's mentality, and people give up hope completely of working or looking for work because of repeated failure to stand up, look for work and earn an honest living. For most of the poor it's a matter of survival. Few other things matter. Yes, sin is rife among the poor, but there is not less sin among people who are not poor.

It serves no purpose quoting statistics on the number of poor people and their living conditions. We see it every day. The point is quite simply that we must do something about it. The most effective thing to do is firstly, to pray, but praying alone is not good enough. A number of guidelines follow that will help you pray for the poor:

- When we pray for the poor, we must understand first of all, that they did not necessarily contributed to be poor because they sinned or because they are too lazy to work or that they are simple-minded. The fact that someone was born in a squatter camp is for example not due to the fact that this person is bad or wicked or that he/she deserves it, or is stupid and lazy. Do not judge or make assumptions, God is the only one knowing everything.
- Read **Isaiah 58** and pray through the book. Focus on everything concerning poverty and use this as the basis for your prayer. Don't be judgmental when you pray, don't accuse people. Pray that God will be gracious and give deliverance.
- When you pray for the poor, pray with a broken heart and with compassion. Make sure there is no haughtiness in you, no feelings of superiority or condemnation. Share with the poor and don't begrudge them the same grace that God shows you. When we want to pray for the poor, the most important aspect of our prayer is the attitude of our hearts.
- Pray for systems and legislation that will prevent the poor from being exploited and misused. Pray for governments to make laws so that the poor can be helped.
- Millions of rands are made available in countries (by governments and foreign grants) towards caring for the poor. Worldwide statistics show that approximately 2% of the money made available in this way towards the upliftment of the poor actually reaches them. In some cases it is a little more, but normally an insignificant amount of the money reach the people who are in need. Pray that such fraud will come to light and that the poor will reap the benefits of the money.
- Pray for the Church that it will do more than what is done now. Most congregations have projects to care for the poor. The problem is however, that in most cases this is done by a few individuals in the congregation. Also, that church councils/governing boards don't make available considerable amounts of money for this and that the vast majority of church members are uninvolved. Pray that God the Father, through the working of the Holy Spirit will touch the hearts of more people in church councils/governing boards and more church members so that they will become actively involved in the needs of people.
- When we really pray from the heart for the needs of the poor, it is impossible not to become practically involved in the plight of these people. Each one of us can give a few rand extra a month, each one of us has an hour or two more a week that we can use to help the poor and the needy. If you don't know of an existing project, start one. Pray and ask the Lord's guidance. This is how all the other projects started. The Bible is very clear about it that God the Father has a heart for the poor and the destitute and therefore He will help us when we step out in faith and start doing something. Even if we start by helping one or two people and then expand with time, it is good enough.