

Woven throughout Scripture is a theme of God's concern for the oppressed. In fact the New International Version (NIV) uses the words poor and oppressed in 210 verses. Many of those contain commands to protect the poor and warn against exploiting them (Source: Ron Sider, "God's Heart for the Oppressed," *Discipleship Journal*, #126).

Since "all scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV), originating in our Heavenly Father, the very words we are able to read allow us to see into His heart and mind, aid us in knowing Him better. Studying His Word, praying, worshipping Him, and fellowshiping with others in His Body are ways to know Him better. Yet, in His own words, as He notes the life of King Josiah in Jeremiah 22:16, He gives us yet another means of knowing Him: "He [Josiah] defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know Me?" declares the Lord."

"As we build relationships with the poor, we develop a deep sense of who God is and a greater understanding of His desire for our fellowship. Defending the cause of the poor and needy can be a powerful entrance into God's presence. And the more we are with God, the more we want to be with those in need—and vice versa" (Jo Kadlecek, "The Missing Discipline," *Discipleship Journal*, #79).

At the heart of Jesus' mission on earth was bringing the "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18-19, fulfilling Isaiah 61). His life and message recorded in the gospels give evidence to this. "The poor of the world today need Jesus. They need to see that the God who sent His Son to die for their sins also cares about their poverty, hates injustice, and invites them to become coworkers in His kingdom. Many of those who are despised, trampled, and famished will only see Jesus if we're willing to meet their real, physical needs" (Ron Sider).



Picture Jesus as He gazes upon the city of Jerusalem—"the city He loved with fury, the city that had broken His heart (Matthew 23:38; Luke 13:34) ... Do you want to see the heart of God? Then look here, upon the faces of God's children: tear-streaked, pain-creased, terrifying in their holy need. Behold how He loves them: fragile little creatures, weak and poor, sick and dying, hungry and thirsty, naked and lone. The least of His brethren, He suffers with them; He cries through

them; He holds them so close to His heart that whatever is done for them is done for Him (Matthew 25:31-46)" (Paul Thigpen, "Why Should I Care?" *Discipleship Journal*, #113).

That passage in Matthew is found in the midst of other parts of Jesus' messages about the responsibilities of His followers. He is nearing His own death and He provides us with greater understanding of how He desires for us to live as we follow Him.

"Hear God's message of long ago to His chosen people, carried off in chains to ancient Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied, 'Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper' (Jeremiah 29:7).

The welfare of the community is our welfare. The good of the homeless family, the penniless immigrant, the pimp, and the prostitute is our God. If we would be healed ourselves, we must seek the healing of our community."

- Paul Thigpen

"Christian community development leader John Perkins believes that fulfilling the Great Commission involves three R's: reconciliation of people to God and to each other; redistribution of resources and talents within the whole Body of Christ for all the people; and relocation of homes, services, and ministries to live incarnationally among people in need ... if these three things happen, then disciples are won and nurtured."

- Jo Kadlecek