

Chapter 3: Volunteerism: An Act After Jesus' Own Heart

Life Application Verses:

Mark 14: 3-9. While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining *at the table*, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; *and* she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly *remarking* to one another, “Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and *the money* given to the poor.” And they were scolding her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”

In the times in which we live, you can't turn on the 'tele' or access the Internet without some mention of the struggle between the rich and the poor, Republicans and Democrats, white vs. people of color, and a plethora of other issues. The political climate in the nation seems to be tearing it apart from the very core from which it was founded. Inclusion, political correctness, and diversity—to name just a few issues—seem to have more buzz words than a bee at pollination time. It reminds me of the words of Jesus in Matthew 12: 25: “And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, ‘Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand.’” The Heavenly Minded words of Jesus are an Earthly Good warning to nations, families, groups, races, politicians, colleges, and churches across our nation and our global existence. In spite of these problems, there are some good things in this nation. While the good can't be discussed *in toto* in this chapter of the book, I want to focus on a few and ask you to consider becoming a volunteer for one of more of these.

I recently completed an intensive 9-month program in the City of Montgomery, where my wife and I have lived, worked, and raised up a daughter and are now active grandparents for our granddaughter and grandson. The program was *Leadership Montgomery*, and our team project was *FoodForKids-Montgomery*¹, where we established a program to feed homeless kids in the early grades of school. The project required us to locate a source of nutritious food at a cost that our team could afford to feed as many kids as possible. Using our modest donations, we coordinated with the Montgomery Area Food Bank to supply our food for distribution in

¹ For an extensive understanding of BackPack Programs, visit: <http://www.ricedepot.org/ffk.asp>.

backpacks at the schools. With this in mind, let me take you to what Jesus had to say about the poor and needy that live in our neighborhoods across the American landscape and our world.

If you look at the Life Application verses, Jesus was talking to his disciples about why a good deed for him was not to be confused with another issue: “For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them...” Did you catch that little phrase, “whenever you wish...” Did you get the POWER in those words that Jesus spoke? Talk about Heavenly Minded, Earthly Good!!! WOW! I can even say it backwards: !WOW. Jesus didn’t say, “Hey, you only need to take care of the poor when you think of them in passing”; no, he said something so Heavenly Minded that it constitutes a mandate to motivate ourselves to want to do Earthly Good and help the poor. What Jesus was actually doing is tapping into our Free Will to go and do Earthly Good things in His name. The good things, in this case, are to help feed those who need our help. Come with me as I logically build a case for why being Earthly Good is a 24x7 event!

Maybe you can’t give \$1,000,000 to a food bank; in fact, you might not even be able to give \$10, but every single one of us who are truly able to do so can volunteer to do something. It has been attributed to Helen Keller (and others) who said: “I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do.” Did you get the meaning in this truth that simply because I am only one, I will not sit down on my duffs and do nothing! I will get up and do what I can. Do you think God finds fault in this? In other words, do you think Jesus would have criticized Helen Keller for making this statement? I don’t think that even warrants a response, do you?! Good, on this consensus, we agree.

If you follow the logic in the power of the statement by Helen Keller, you will suddenly realize that we have a responsibility to help our less fortunate neighbors, friends, and family as we are able—not as we might want, but as we are able. As Charles Swindoll stated in his book, *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication*², “Wherever the Providence of God casts us, we should desire and endeavor to be useful: and, when we cannot do the good we would, we must be

² Swindoll, C. (1999). *Moses: A man of selfless dedication*. Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, Division of Thomas Nelson, Inc.

ready to do the good we can. And he that is faithful in a little shall be entrusted with more” (p. 65). Now, take this idea of doing what we are able to do because we choose to do what we can even when we might want to do more as a mandate to action. Let me return to the *FoodForKids-Montgomery* project for a moment.

Our original goal was to raise \$20,000 for the project. We intended to go into as many schools as we could and provide backpacks of food for as many of the homeless kids as humanly possible. However, our project moved only as fast as humanly possible. We did what we could to the best of our ability even as we encountered broken hearts at not being able to do more. In essence, we desired and endeavored to be useful, but because we could not accomplish the good we would, we did the very best Earthly Good we could. Our team didn't throw in the towel with the attitude that because we could not achieve our ultimate goal that we would simply vanquish the project. To my way of thinking, I heard the words of Jesus: “For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them.” Our team was fulfilling the Truth of Jesus.

Now, in order for the backpacks to be filled with food for the weekend to feed these homeless kids, the process required volunteers. These volunteers came from: the schools, the community, the contributors, the food bank, the parents, the members of our team, the students who helped at the local schools, and churches. The key word here is ‘volunteer.’ Returning to Webster, what is a volunteer? These are individuals who exhibit the following traits:

- a) They voluntarily undertake or express a willingness to undertake a service;
- b) They proceed from the will or from one's own choice or consent;
- c) They are unconstrained by interference;
- d) They act from one's own free will without value consideration or legal obligation;
- e) They apply free choice of one's own outcome without external compulsion;
- f) They look like you and me (author's addition);
- g) They desire to serve God by giving unconditionally to others (author's addition);
- h) They look in the mirror and say, “If not me, then who?” (author's addition).

Let's take a look at who the poor are at this point. Be aware that we are not speaking to simply a condition of finances. Let me give you an example of a student that I had who sent me an email. She had been looking for work for several months and at the writing of this email, she still had not been able to find full-time employment. She had two small daughters, was a devout Christian and Faithful, had just completed her degree, yet was struggling with finances, finding secure work other than three part-time jobs, and life was hard for her. Her needs were many, including financial, Spiritual, and someone to talk to and pray with her. As Jesus noted, "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them..." How can we as a nation become so compassionate to people that when someone like this comes along, we desire to invoke Heavenly Mindedness to bring them as much Earthly Good as possible in the name of Jesus? Has our world gotten so 'me-centered' that true compassion for others has waned? If I couldn't solve all her problems, then surely I could have helped by doing something—which I did, but in sincerity, I could have done much more.

When I speak to this topic, I'm not talking about just those who already have a Spirit of Love for those less fortunate. I am talking about the average=ordinary citizen in America. I have seen so much apathy in so many areas of the nation since '9/11' that sometimes I think that our Blessed United States of America has become a self-indulgent, self-centered culture and volunteerism has become almost passé. There are countless pockets of volunteers, but volunteerism is no longer the norm. In fact, without conducting research to determine what the collected and processed data might suggest, I would 'best-guess' that in most neighborhoods we don't even know who our neighbors are by name and need. If this is true, how in God's Grace and Mercy can we possibly know of the needs of our poor—by whatever they may be poor in; for example, do they need help financially, Spiritually, educationally, legally, and so on? If Jesus told us that we can help these individuals 'whenever you wish', then when will we ever get to the 'whenever' part? Tomorrow, next week, next year, never!?

Volunteering to help in your community is as simple as an act of your will. Take our project, for instance. We purchased our food at a highly reduced cost so that we might be able to extend our donations ten-fold. For this to occur, we needed training. This training came "out of hide" so-to-speak. You had to make time for it (a two-hour session), and then you had

to make time to shop at the food bank. After shopping, there came the packing of the backpacks and distributing the backpacks to students as they left the premises and returned on Monday. All of this, from idea to application, was based on man-hours of volunteerism. It was our 'whenever you wish' Earthly Good for the homeless kids in our schools. Our team could have decided to do something else, but we desired to help these less fortunate kids. My prayer in all of this effort is that some of the kids will pay-it-forward and choose to remember even those less fortunate than themselves someday in their own lives. The original backpack program to feed homeless and hungry kids came from the *Arkansas Rice Depot* project, with current outcomes as: 1) Serving more than 35,000 Arkansas children in over 600 public schools; 2) the Food For Kids project was the original backpack program; and, 3) Started in 1994, adapted by organizations in 40 states nationwide and most recently in Mexico. All because of volunteers! And I have to believe that Jesus loves a cheerful giver—e.g., a volunteer!

In fact, on the Arkansas Rice Depot web site, at the very center of the web site is the following: "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'" (Matthew 25:40). Am I advocating that you stop out and drop out of work, or ignore your family? No. I am advocating that you look at the needs in your town, city, state, nation, and internationally to see if you might be able to do for the least of these less fortunate and volunteer to make a difference. Join an organization and become an active member. In your local church, what can you do that will make a difference? If you desire to be useful, yet you cannot do the good that you would like to do, be ready to do the good you can. Remember: "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do." God knows our hearts; we cannot hide the thoughts or intents of our hearts from Him. If you desire to help, pray to Him for guidance and I believe that He will open the door to allow you to bring your gifts of volunteerism to the benefit of those who need help.

While it might be argued that Christian communities volunteer at higher rates than secular communities, the need to help those less fortunate is a given fact. In the *Leadership Montgomery* program for the 9-months that we were together, there was a consensus from the 40+ members that to help others was more important than the time we must devote to work

hard to develop community projects to improve the lives of citizens in the city. I would like to think that as a matter of daily practice, the Christian community in every locale of our nation would lead the charge to help the poor at every opportunity and to bring into the fold the secular community so that not only is the volunteer spirit promoted and advanced, but that at the very least the Love of Jesus Christ may be demonstrated to such a degree that the secular community might ask the question: "What gives you all such joy?" In turn, we might witness of the Saving Power of God in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This too, meets the needs of those who need our help. Jesus fed the five-thousand; He also ministered to their Souls as well.

Please remember that our poor may be Poor in Spirit, Poor in Finances, Poor in Health, Poor in Confidence, Poor in Reading and Writing, Poor in Family Leadership, Poor in Being Loved, Poor in Attitude, Poor in So Many Other Areas—these poor need us too. They need Jesus and we are the Voice of God to lead them to Salvation and to remember the words of Jesus: "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them." May it be that we wish to do Earthly Good for them at every turn and Honor our God by being consistently Heavenly Minded. Oh, and don't forget to look inward at the needs of your family—meet their needs with haste and do not neglect their desire to be loved and cared for...

A Question of Curiosity:

How many of us are but one paycheck or health issue or family situation away from becoming poor in some area of our lives? Do we do unto those less fortunate in whatever area of poorness that they need our help? We might want to consider how we would feel if we were treated in our own areas of poorness as we treat others. While finances might be a major issue, feeling unloved, unwanted, or neglected is a state of being poor, as well. Jesus met the needs of those He encountered exactly where they needed His help, while also looking at their Soul in Eternity. Should we do any less?

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"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least among you, you did not do for me.'" ~Matthew 25:41-45 ~

"He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." ~ Proverbs 14:31 ~

"A pessimist, they say, sees a glass of water as being half empty; an optimist sees the same glass as half full. But a giving person sees a glass of water and starts looking for someone who might be thirsty." ~ G. Donald Gale ~

**"In this troubled world, it's refreshing to find someone who still has the time to be kind.
Someone who still has the faith to believe that the more you give, the more you receive.
Someone who's ready by thought, word, or deed to reach out a hand, in the hour of need.
~ Helen Stiner Rice ~**

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My Prayer For You:

Father, this world is a place of mystery. It contains both the good and the evil; the rich and the poor; the saved and the lost. For those of us who have received Salvation in Christ Jesus, may we be of service to You in this life so that in Eternal Life, we might hear the most cherished words of all: "Well done, thy good and faithful servant. Enter into Thy rest." It is my most urgent prayer before Your Throne of Grace and Mercy that we who are the Followers of Christ, bring our time and energies to bear on helping those less fortunate; to draw into this process those who also need the Saving Grace of Jesus Christ, for those who are lost are the ultimate poor in life. Their very souls are in need of Salvation and may we reach out to them as we also reach out to the needy in our community. May we serve you, O God, Honorably and Faithfully. May we be the Hands and Feet of Jesus as we go out to serve others in their need, whatever that need may be and where they live. Oh, God, that we would be Followers of Jesus to others as we volunteer to serve in His Precious Name as our Lord of Lords, King of Kings, and Savior. In the Precious and Holy Name of Jesus I humbly and confidently lift up this prayer. Amen.

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Arkansas Rice Depot
"Hunger no more."
<http://www.ricedepot.org/about-us/arkansas-rice-depot-info/>

On the next page, you will find a page from the website of the Arkansas Rice Depot. If you visit this website and review its contents, work being done, and the outcomes of this volunteer organization, you will see something very profound in its mission: "If you give food to the hungry, and satisfy those who are in need, then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon." (Isaiah 58: 10). This organization uses volunteers and others to meet not only the needs of the hungry, but others in the Name of Jesus. Can you imagine if we had 'Arkansas Rice Depot's' in every home, neighborhood, community, city, state, and nation? What a world that would be, that no one was hungry, unloved, or never heard of Jesus? As recently as Christmas, 2016, our local church sent volunteers to tell community children of the Christmas

story. As part of this mission, the volunteer group also asked how many of these children had ever heard of the Birth of Jesus and the true Christmas story. Nearly half of these children were unaware of the Truth of why we celebrate Christmas. Do you think, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, that we need more volunteers to feed the needs of these children—that need being the Saving Grace of Christ Jesus! Not only do we need to feed the hunger of people, but we need to feed the Souls of those who have never heard of God's Gift in Christ Jesus. Thus, **Volunteerism: An Act After Jesus' Own Heart**. Here am I, send me!

The screenshot shows the Arkansas Rice Depot website. At the top left is the logo with the text "Arkansas Rice Depot" and "hunger no more". To the right is a green "Donate" button with a right arrow. Below that is a "Sign Up For eNews" section with an "Email Address" input field and a "GO" button. A navigation bar contains links for "who we serve", "how can i help", "agency resources", "about us" (highlighted in red), and "gift shop". The main content area features a sidebar with "about us" selected, listing links for "Arkansas Rice Depot Info", "Our Story", "Our Partners", "Our Leaders", "Careers", "Financials", "Hunger Info", "How Foodbanking Works", "Newsletter", and "Location & Hours". The main heading is "Arkansas Rice Depot Info". The text describes the mission as "improving the lives of hungry Arkansans" and lists core values: Faith, Integrity, Teamwork, Compassion, Service, and Love. A quote from Isaiah 58:10 is at the bottom.

Arkansas Rice Depot
hunger no more

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Location & Hours

Arkansas Rice Depot Info

Arkansas Rice Depot has a simple yet daunting mission of *improving the lives of hungry Arkansans*.

We empower and provide dignity and hope to families, and contribute to improved academics for children by providing nutritious food.

We envision *communities that are healthier, happier and more productive through improved nutrition*.

These core values guide our decisions and actions:

- Faith
- Integrity
- Teamwork
- Compassion
- Service
- Love

"If you give food to the hungry, and satisfy those who are in need, then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon." Isaiah 58:10