

Thought Captivation

"We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." 2Cor 10:5



God of the Empty-Handed: Poverty, Power, and the Kingdom of God

Christian, Jayakumar, *God of the Empty-Handed: Poverty, Power, and the Kingdom of God*, Monrovia, California: MARC, 1999. One of several required books I read for the two Fuller Seminary courses I began this summer. For the past 17 years, I have been mobilizing students to serve the Poor. As I read this book I was challenged to understand several keys to ministry among the poor. I'm convinced these key principles are important for most church ministries. That is why I recommend this book to you.

Key #1: Knowing Who Are the Poor.

Jesus said: "The poor will always be with you". Jayakumar Christian says that the Poor are caught in a web of relationships. Robert Chambers writes, "poverty is entanglement". That is to say, they are caught in a web of systems; they have a lack of power, materials, choices, relationships, and influence. Donald McGavran contends that the Poor are exempt from experiencing transformation until they have all been saved: "The only place large social action is possible is in countries where the majority of the population are members of Christ's Church." (p. 78) Most missionary agencies today take this perspective into their ministry approaches. What do you think? Is poverty caused by sin? Is it the sin of others? Is poverty caused by the sin of the Poor? At what point are the Poor set free from the cycle of poverty? The Poor are living on bare subsistence; no savings, no investments, no opportunity for technological improvements, and therefore no income increase. The Poor are set free when they gain understanding of their identity in God and discover their calling in God.

Key #2: Kingdom View of the Poor.

Ministries of the church, whether intentional or not, reflect the church's view of the poor and the nature of poverty. Too often our outreach unintentionally communicates: "We are complete, you are not." The goal of outreach should be to recover the identity of the poor in relation to God's creative design and purpose. If our outreach emphasizes the discovery of vocation, for the Christian participant and for the community in which they minister, we will fulfill the commission to preach the good news to the poor. We will set free the poor to enjoy just and peaceful relationships. The way we can reach these goals is by demonstrating a servant heart, the nature of our servant King Jesus. In our outreach to the Poor we must present community demonstrating the biblical story in our relationships. Our outreach can portray the character of God his callings. God is healer, communicator, builder, author, creator, artist, counselor, teacher, etc. Outreach should necessitate a community of servants that represent the character of God and the holistic and interrelated spheres of His ministry.

Key #3: Power from the Throne of God.

The Poor are powerless in many respects. The Poor are denied access; they are held in powerlessness because of broken relationships. Principalities and Powers, rulers of darkness, lock them out and keep them in the cycle of poverty. Relationship is the key dynamic of the throne of God. The Poor need to be connected in relationship with God and his world. Sin separates us; relationships of all kinds suffer due to sin. The poor are no different from anyone; they need to be connected to others. The connection with others should not be primarily for the sake of provision; providing food, shelter and medicines has often been used as a means of control. The poor need to be connected with the broader community where they have been restricted from access. A kingdom based response to poverty will reverse the "process of dis-empowerment", "confront god-complexes" (of the Poor and the non-poor), heal bodies and relationships, teach and model a more adequate worldview, challenge the principalities and powers of darkness (including institutions that are instruments of those powers), establish "truth and righteousness", and proclaim that "all power belongs to God." Poverty, ultimately, is the poverty of "being" and of "purpose". Conversely, abundant life is the abundance of "being" and "purpose". It is from the vantage point of the throne of God that an individual and a people may find their God-given identity and vocation conferring the essential being and purpose.

Key #4: Defend the Image of God in the Poor.

The Church is called to define and defend the image of God in the Poor. The Poor are not lazy or stupid. Jayakumar Christian writes, "A people so close to the edge cannot afford laziness or stupidity. They have to work and work hard. Most of the lazy and stupid are dead." Outreach should intentionally celebrate and enhance life without limiting access to love, justice, or peace. We should minister among the poor addressing the cultural, social, spiritual, personal, and biological spheres of the community. Through our outreach, we can intentionally affect the whole system of poverty by restoring relationships, including relationship with God (religion, philosophy, theology), Community (political science and economics), the Environment (biology, ecology, engineering), Others (sociology, international relations, justice), and Individuals (psychology, health care).

📁 John T Henry, UofN Student Mobilization Centre of Youth With A Mission, 1401 Ellen Ave. Madison, WI 53716 USA