

Untouchables
Poverty
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We started a series of messages last week on untouchables. We're looking at some of those topics that the church has kind of over the years been reluctant to talk about. And today we're gonna talk about poverty. Now some of you hear that and say, "Now, wait a second, pastor. I mean, last year when we did untouchables we talked about things like abortion and homosexuality and racism, and last week we talked about pornography. And then you throw in poverty? I mean, poverty doesn't seem like an untouchable. In fact it seems like everywhere we turn in our society today we read and we hear about people dealing with this whole issue of making poverty history, right? And I mean, when you turn on *American Idol* and you see the Idol gives back and they raise millions of dollars to help poverty, children in poverty around the world. You read the newspaper about guys like, you know, Warren Buffet and Bill Gates who are giving literally billions of dollars to charitable causes, helping people in poverty. How in the world can this be an untouchable?"

Well, let me say this: While the world is talking a whole lot about poverty, quite honestly in the Church, we've tended to turn a blind eye to this whole thing. Don't believe me? I just read a study that was done by George Barna, and it was done among Evangelical Christians, people who are Bible-believing Christians, and only 14 percent of Evangelical Christians believe that poverty was an issue that the Church should take a lead in. Eighty-six percent of people who sit in churches just like this one all across America, week in and week out, believe that poverty is someone else's problem. That it's not something that the church should take a lead in. Let me be honest with you for a moment. Until just recently, I was a part of the 86 percent who didn't believe we should do anything about poverty. That was somebody else's issue. That was somebody else's problem. Oh, sure, I believed in parts of the world where there were starving children, that if we wanted to evangelize those nations, we've got to first of all feed those children.



But it was kind of just a means to an end so that we could tell these people about Jesus. Now, don't get me wrong, we have a responsibility as a church to tell people about Jesus, but as I have studied and as I have been working through this in my own journey and my own walk with the Lord, I've come to find out that there is a whole lot of scripture that talks about our responsibility to minister to people on the fringes of society, people who are in need, people who are experiencing poverty, that says absolutely nothing about evangelism. It's not just a means to an end.

Let me tell you a little bit about kind of the journey God's been taking me on. About a year ago, I went on a mission trip to Panama and after spending a week out in the jungle, in one of the poorest areas I've ever been in, in my life, God began to speak to me a little bit about this issue, but quite honestly I kind of shoved it aside. Then this last spring, we were on a vacation at one of my boy's ball tournaments for a weekend, and we attended a church and the pastor brought a message on poverty. As I listened to that message again, God began to speak to my heart and began to talk to me about so many scriptures that are there that deal with this whole issue of poverty that I kind of had ignored in the past. A few weeks later, my oldest son, Michael, 16, he went downtown with the youth group, began to become a part of a Saturday ministry where they go down and they pass out food and give water and socks, things like that to people on the streets who are homeless. The first time he went, he came back so excited, he said, "This seems to be what Christianity is really all about." There was something that was happening inside him. "I can't wait 'til next Saturday to go back. I really want to go back tomorrow." We held him back; we made him wait 'til the next Saturday. He wasn't going downtown by himself. We weren't ready for that to take place. But God was beginning to speak to me even further through my son.

In June, I had an opportunity to go on a mission trip to Ecuador with Compassion International. We went with a group of pastors to see the work that was happening there, as Compassion was ministering to poor children in that country. As I saw the ministry that was taking place there, as they were helping release children from poverty in Jesus' name, I began to become even more moved with our responsibility to be a part of this. On that trip Dr. Wess Stafford, the president and CEO of Compassion, was with us, and he taught us day in and day out about what it means to be a Christian leader and about our response to poverty. And again, I was just overwhelmed with all the Bible verses that spoke to this particular issue.

When I came back from that trip, I made a commitment that during July, during the study break that I just came off of, one of the things I was really going to dive into and I

was going to study was this whole issue of what the Bible says about poverty. And so I began to read every Bible verse that I could find about our responsibility in this area, I read a couple of books that were recommended to me, I listened to some messages that people had handed to me. And as I listened and as I read and as I studied, I became increasingly convinced that God's heart for people who are poor is huge! And that He calls us as Christ-followers to learn to give our life away in this very, very important ministry. And you know what? As I studied those verses, so few of them said anything about connecting this to evangelism. It was simply about this: If you know Jesus and you love Jesus and you see somebody in need and you walk away from that person then you don't really love Jesus. That was the message that I was reading over and over and over again as I began to study through the Scripture. It was simply about learning to display the love of Jesus day in and day out.

And yet, so many of us in the church, the church of Christ in general, we have turned a blind eye. And so many people out in the world have done so much more to respond to this issue of poverty than people who call themselves followers of Jesus Christ. And quite honestly, that bothers me. That bothers me a whole lot. I want to pretend like it really doesn't count when people who don't know Jesus respond and they meet these needs in the area of poverty. That really doesn't make a difference. But here's what I've come to understand the more that I have studied. I really believe that compassion and mercy are character traits that God has placed in the human heart. And that's why somebody who doesn't even know Jesus Christ, when they begin to respond to those who are in need, there is something that stirs up inside of them that becomes contagious and wants them to pour their life even further to this, whether they understand the reason why they do that or not. It's only when we become Christ followers that we begin to understand the rhyme or the reason that some of these things that God already is doing in our heart, there are a whole lot of things that God has just kind of placed into the human soul and as we connect with Him and as we walk with Him, then we understand the answer and we understand the reason. And those of us who have come to that point ought to be the ones who are out in front who are leading the charge when it comes to issues like this one that are very dear to the heart of God.

Now, one of the things that I had heard about this whole issue of poverty, I heard Tony Campolo say this. He said that there are 2,000 Bible verses that directly or indirectly speak to the subject of poverty. I wanted to find all 2,000 of them. I haven't yet. I think I've only found about 1,000 of them. So we're going to work our way through that thousand

this morning. Do you have some time for that today? OK, maybe not all thousand of them, but we're going to kind of work our way through this and see what the Bible has to say about this because here is my desire today. My desire, as we walk through these scriptures, is that God will open up your heart as He has mine, so that together we will see through His eyes the needs of those who are hungry in our world and that we will hear through His ears their cries for help.

Now we're gonna look at a lot of Bible verses. They're going to be up here on the screen. I'm not going to ask you to turn to all of these today because it will take us quite a bit of time to get through this. But let me start with this one. Deuteronomy chapter 15, verse 10, God's word says this "Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do." As you start to read through the Bible and you start to really pay attention to these verses that talk about poverty, one of the things that becomes abundantly clear is that God has this huge, incredible heart for people who live in poverty. It is an issue that is very near and very dear to the heart of our God. And what is His plan for reaching out to people who are in poverty? His plan is you and me. And so He calls for people like us to respond by being generous with the poor. Notice what He says here — you give generously to the poor, and when you learn, when I learn to give generously to the poor, when this becomes a part of who we are, then God says, "There are blessings that He will pour into our life." And this is not an isolated scripture that talks about this. Over and over again as you read the Bible you will find that as we learn to respond to those who are in need, when we meet the need of someone who lives in poverty, that we connect with the heart of God in a way that we might connect in no other way. And there are blessings that God wants to pour into our life that we do not receive in any other way. Don't miss that! You don't read this about very many things in scripture, but one of those things that God says, "You want to get in on my blessings? You want to get in on the best that I have for your life, here's how you do it: You learn to give generously to the poor."

Proverbs chapter 19, verse 17 says this: "If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord — and he will repay you!" Now quite honestly, I read that verse, I say, "Now wait a second here! How in the world can you and I lend anything to God? He already owns it all anyway, right? How can we lend anything to God and say, 'God, we're giving this to You. You owe us something.'" The Bible says God is no man's debtor. How can God owe us something? I don't understand it. But I know that God says that this true; that when you and I give to the poor it's like we are lending to God Himself; He is using that to fund

them, to meet a need that is out there in their life. And God says when you do that, I will repay you. How will God repay you? I don't know. But I know He promises that He will. And I know that He is saying to us that "I will continue to meet your needs." And it's a promise from God. And since it's a promise from God, I can guarantee you it is absolutely true. And let me say this, I think the same thing is also true of us as a church, I think as a church as we respond more to the heart of God for people who live in poverty, that God's blessing will be all over this church. That God will repay us and make sure that every ministry need that is here in this church is completely funded because we're lending to the Lord and God will repay us.

Proverbs chapter 21, verse 13, says the flip-side of this is also true: "Those who shut their ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in their own time of need." God says if you ignore those who live in poverty, if you shut your eyes to this, if you shut your ears to their cries, don't come crying to Me when there is a need in your own life. Maybe you wonder why God's not responding to your needs. Maybe you wonder why it feels as though sometimes your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling and God's not responding to you, maybe this is why. "Those who shut their ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in their own time of need."

Here's a powerful passage. First John chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. We come into the New Testament and listen to what the New Testament says about this: "We know what real love is because Jesus gave up His life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well ..." Now, let me stop right there for a minute, you're going, "Oh, maybe that's not me." Listen, if you make 25,000 dollars a year, there's a world wealth calculator that you can look at on the Internet. If you make 25,000 dollars a year, you're wealthier than 90 percent of the world. I think this applies to all of us, doesn't it?

"... so we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well, and sees a brother and sister in need but shows no compassion — how can God's love be in that person?" The answer: It can't be! That's what He's saying to us here. If we say that we love God, if that's a part of who we are and what we're talking about on a regular basis, but yet we only express that love to ourselves or to our family, or maybe to God as we come to worship and to pray, and we don't express it to those who are in need, John's telling us we don't really love God. That's pretty powerful isn't it? Because when we know God and we love God, His love will become something that is expressed in our life as we deal with those who are in need. Friends, this is what

authentic Christianity is all about. And it's only when this authentic Christianity is lived out in our lives that the world sees the love of Jesus in us and they will be drawn to Him, drawn to that. They so desperately need to know God and they want to know God. But they don't want to hear us talk about God. They don't want to hear us just simply present a message to them. They want to see a message lived out in our lives and that's what this love is all about. That's why Jesus said. "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love ... if you love one another." You see, this love is expressed and people are drawn to God.

See, if God's love is alive in us personally, or if God's love is alive in the church, how are people going to recognize that that love is alive? Will it be by our church attendance? No. Will it be by our great worship times? No. Will it be by how many people are going to Bible studies or attending a small group? No. Will it be by our giving? No. The way that it will be represented is by how we relate to and respond to those who are in need. You see, our response to those who are in need indicates our allegiance to Jesus Christ much more than how often we are in church or how many times a day we pray or how many times we go to Bible study or small group or any of these other things. Now don't get me wrong. All those things are great and all of those things need to be a part of our walk with the Lord. But here's what I think He's saying to us: If you do those things and they don't lead to any action in your life, then all of those studies and worship and church attendance and prayer are worthless in your life.

Now I talk to far too many Christians who seem to define their Christianity by how busy they are in the church. I don't think that's what God's looking for. I don't think that's what impresses God; I don't believe that that's what's going to draw people to Him. You see, genuine faith is reflected by how we respond to those who are in need. That's what James says. Listen to James chapter 2, another passage of scripture, beginning with verse 14: "What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, 'Goodbye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well' — but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?" So you see faith by itself isn't enough. And unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and it is useless. I really believe that people in the world are sick and tired of hearing us talk about God. I think they are sick and tired of hearing us talk about how we believe in this doctrine or we believe in that doctrine, and yet when they look into our life they don't see any genuine love being reflected. See if our lifestyle doesn't reflect that we love

anyone outside of ourselves: Again James says that our faith is not real. Because a real faith and a real God will produce real fruit and the result of that fruit as James says is going to be good deeds. What's the illustration of good deeds that he talks about? You'll feed somebody who needs food. You'll give clothes to someone who needs clothing. I think we've missed this over the years in the Church. I think that we have come to define spiritual maturity as how much you know. I don't think that's what the Bible says. I think the Bible says that spiritual maturity is defined by how well you love, and how you respond to those who are in need.

James chapter 1, verse 27 says this: "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God ..." and I don't know about you, but if there is pure and genuine religion in the sight of God and not in the sight of men, I want in on that. I want to know what God says is pure and genuine religion. "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means [this,] caring for the orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you." You see it over and over again. God has this incredible heart for people who live on the fringes of society, people who are hurting, people who are poor, people who are in need. And His response is to call you and me, who love Jesus, to display that love through our action.

I want to look at another passage, and this is a rather long one so if you want to turn to this one, go ahead: Isaiah chapter 58. Isaiah is a prophet from God. He is given a word from the Lord to give to God's people, the nation of Israel, to talk to them about the fact that they had this long list of do's and don'ts and they are trying to do all these things to impress God, but all of these religious pursuits that are going on in their life are not bearing any fruit in the way that they respond to people. And so God's going to address this, God's going to talk to them about this through His prophet Isaiah. So, Isaiah chapter 58, beginning with verse 1: "Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins! Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and they seem to be delighted to learn all about me. They act like a religious nation that would never abandon the laws of its God." So here's what's going on with the people: They're showing up for church, not every week, they're showing up for church every single day. I mean, they're studying, they're worshipping. But they're doing all of these things but it's not bearing any fruit in their life. God says it might look good on the surface, it looks wonderful on the outside, but I have something to say about it. Go on; God says, "They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near to me. 'We have fasted before you,' they say." Which I think we would all agree fasting is a

good thing, something that God calls for us to do. We need to encourage that. We need to do that in our life, more and more on an increasing basis. But these people, they're fasting before God, so they say, "God, we're fasting before you ... Why aren't you impressed? We've been very hard on ourselves and you don't even notice it!" They're saying, "God why don't you appreciate this religious activity that we're doing before You?" God responds, He says, "I'll tell you why! It's because you're fasting to please yourselves." God was saying to His people, "You're doing some of the right things, but it's all about you. Your study about Me, your worship of Me, your fasting, all of those things are simply about you performing for yourself because you want to try do something to impress Me." See they were doing some of the right things, but there was no fruit in their life that indicated in any way that these religious activities were about anyone other than themselves.

God goes on, "Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers. What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? That kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with Me. You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind. You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes." That's what they would do when they would fast so that they would impress everybody about their fasting that was going on. God says, "Is this what you call fasting? Do you think this is what would really please the Lord?" God's saying, "Do you think this is what I really want? Do you think this is what impresses Me? No." God says, "This is the kind of fasting that I want ..." And don't miss this because I think this next section is so powerful, and something that I believe that God wants us to get into the very DNA of who we are as a church here at Southeast. "This is the kind of fasting I want. Free those who are wrongly imprisoned ... That is what impresses Me. Lighten the burden of those who work for you. That's what impresses Me. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. That's what impresses Me. Share your food with the hungry ... That impresses me. And give shelter to the homeless. That impresses Me. Give clothes to those who need them ... That impresses Me. ... and do not hide from relatives who need your help." Now that's a tough one isn't it? I ran to hide from Uncle John or Aunt Suzie on payday because they always seem to show up, you know, every time payday rolls around. He says, "You don't ignore those relatives who are in need."

Verse 8: "Then, then when you are doing these things that display the heart of God to people, when you are feeding those who are hungry, when you're giving clothes to those who need clothing, then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will

protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer. 'Yes, I am here,' he will quickly reply." Notice that when you aren't just learning about God, when you aren't just attending a church service or going to a Bible study, but you're actually living out your faith, by serving those who need, who are in need, then God says, "When you call on Me, I will answer." Don't miss this! Some of you, you know, you started in your walk with the Lord and you started learning some new things and there was some growth that started to take place in your walk with the Lord. But if you were honest about it today, you'd say, "You know what? I feel like I'm stuck. I feel like I've just kind of gotten into this rut and I'm not growing in the way that I used to grow." Can I be honest with you this morning and tell you why that's the case? If you find yourself stuck, it's probably for this reason right here. You are not giving your life away. That's it. There is only so far that you can grow as a follower of Jesus Christ by learning new things. It's only as you learn to respond to those who are in need and to give your life away to those who are in need that you're going to begin to experience the growth that God wants you to experience in your life. And some of you are stuck. And you're wondering what in the world is wrong here? Maybe the problem is the Church. Maybe that's the reason; I need to go find a new church and then things will be right in my walk with the Lord. Or I need to find a new Bible study to attend. I go to church, I go to Bible study, but I'm just not really growing the way that I feel like I should in my life. But just as the answer lies with their fasting, all of these religious activities that we do can simply be about ourselves. And as long as your life is about you, and you're simply attending things and learning about things and you aren't giving your life away to anybody else, you're gonna be stuck in your walk with the Lord.

See, I think that's God's heart and I think that's what He is calling us to. We think, "Boy, it's the church's fault. I need to find a new church." No. "I need to find a new Bible study." No, I think it's that we need to learn to give our life away. You might find a new church or a new Bible study and feel better for a while because you're starting to learn something new and that might make you feel on the surface like you're growing a little more but all you've done is increase knowledge and you're gonna get stuck again if you don't get this. It's only as you learn to give your life away that you will begin to experience the growth that God wants in your life. Until you start seeing those who are poor through His eyes, and hearing the cries of those who are poor through His ears, you will be stuck because knowledge alone does not produce spiritual growth. You will never grow to spiritual maturity until you learn to give your life away. God calls for you and me to learn this lesson.

Let's go on. "Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors!" Verse 10, "Feed the hungry ..." There it is a second time. "... and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine from the darkness, and the darkness all around you will be as bright as the noon. God will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever flowing spring." Doesn't that sound good? I don't know about you, but I want my light to shine in the darkness. I want to experience what it means to be guided by God continually in my life. I want God to fill me up. I want God be the one to restore my strength. When you add all of these things together that happen in our life when we learn to give our life away, and our life's no longer about ourselves, but it becomes focused on other people, when we understand that, then it sounds like God's saying you will experience my absolute best for your life. Friends, this only happens as we learn to give our life away. That's why it says to you and me, you feed those who are hungry; you help those who are in trouble. Then these things will happen in your life. There is something about ministering to the people on the fringes of society, seeing those needs and responding to those needs that will escalate our spiritual growth in a way that nothing else can. It's the heart of God and we connect with him in ways that we never will otherwise.

There is one more passage that I want us to look at. It's Matthew chapter 25, and Matthew chapter 25; We get a glimpse into the judgment day. And Jesus is talking about those on the judgment day who are going to be standing before Him, those who have responded to needs, those who are going to be coming into the kingdom of Heaven. And let's pick this up in Matthew chapter 25, verse 34: "Then the King will say to those on his right," those who are going into heaven, "Come you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me. Then the righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'" "You were doing it me."

Now, let's stop right there; I want to talk about this for a moment. Here's what I don't mistakenly want you to hear Jesus saying in that passage or think that I am

implicating this morning. Jesus is not saying that if you do all these things that's what's going to get you into the kingdom of heaven. That's not true at all. That's not what He's saying. Here's what I think He's saying. I think He's saying, "If you've responded by faith and you really know me and you really love me, here's how you are going to know in your life, you'll be doing these things. That's why those who are ushered into the kingdom are those who are feeding the hungry, and meeting the needs of the poor, giving clothing, all those kind of things; because that's the mark of somebody who really knows who Jesus is, who has fallen in love with Him, who has a heart that is like His heart. That's what Jesus is saying to us. You know it's easy to look at this issue of poverty in the world and say, "It's so overwhelming; I mean there are literally millions and millions of starving people and children around this world. It's so overwhelming. We can't totally meet that need, right?" And so you say, "I just won't do anything about it." But I want to call you attention to what Jesus said here. He said not when you do it to the multitudes, but when you do it to one of the least of these, you don't do it for Me, you do it to Me. You see, there is something about connecting with people who are poor that puts us face to face with Jesus.

Now, if you're like me, living in Parker, Colorado, we don't see a whole lot of poverty, do we? I mean, we live in an area where there's just not a whole lot of it and it's easy to turn our head and say, "You know what? If Scott put somebody in my path, if I saw somebody who was in need, then I would reach out and then I would minister." I don't think that's the challenge that God gives us. I think God calls us to be proactive in this. I think He calls for us to look for opportunities to meet needs. So how do you do this? How can you respond? How can we, as a church, respond to those who are in need? Well, let me mention a few things this morning that can become a part of who we are, that I think can make an absolute difference. One way that you can respond is through sponsoring a child through Compassion International. Compassion is a ministry that has become extremely dear to my heart in recent weeks and months as I had opportunity to go with them and see the work that they're doing and the way that they are ministering to children in poverty in Ecuador, and I know that they are doing this in many countries around the world. Literally, 100,000 kids gave their life to Christ last year because of the ministry of Compassion International. For 32 dollars a month, 32 dollars a month, here's what you and I can do. We can provide food for a child, we can help provide clothing for a child, we can help provide health care for a child. One sponsor sponsors one child and you connect with that child. And you can begin to make a difference in the life of that child, and it will ultimately make a difference in your life as well.

Let me introduce you to Angie. Angie's picture is going to be up here on the screen. This is the little girl that Trisha and I and our kids, we sponsor, she lives in Ecuador. We have literally hundreds of pictures of Angies sitting on the Compassion display out in the lobby today, who need people like you to respond and to meet their needs. Thirty-two dollars a month. I don't think that's too much for any of us. I think we all probably have some things in our life that we could give up. I don't think there's probably too many people sitting in this room today who could not do that. So here's my challenge. Before you leave this place today, stop by the Compassion table, and say, "You know what? I want to sponsor a kid." I've got a personal goal, I want to see us as a church, over the next year, and we're just going to get started this weekend, over the next year I want to see us as a church sponsor at least 500 children. We started last night, just out of our Saturday night service last night, we had 60-something kids that were sponsored just last evening, a service about half this size. I know we can do even more than that today. And I want to challenge you to go out and be a part of this. You know, you say, "What would I have to give up?" Listen to what Mother Teresa said; this was a quote that kind of ... it meant a lot to me: "It is poverty to decide that a child must die, so we can live as we wish."

See, the United Nations tells us that every five minutes a child in our world dies because of poverty. And when you connect with a child in this way, you can make a huge, huge difference for them. Now, if you already sponsor a child through Compassion, we're going to try to track this, 'cause I said as a church we have this goal of wanting to have 500 kids that we sponsor. If you already sponsor a child through Compassion, go to the MOVE wall today; there's a sheet you can sign up, because we want to know about that, we want to begin to track this because I really believe that this is a ministry that all of us can participate in, and I want to encourage you to stop by and to be a part of that today. Let me tell you about some other things. Maybe you, you know, say, "OK, I can sponsor a child for 32 dollars a month," or maybe two or three or four children; however God has blessed you. But stop by and do that.

But you say, "I want to do something more. I don't want to just send letters to a kid and send a check to a kid. I want to do something to respond to this need." Let me tell you about some other opportunities that we have here as a church. We have a team that goes down a couple times a month to serve food to those who are in need at the Denver Rescue Mission. You can participate in that team. We have a team that goes down every Saturday to minister to homeless people on the streets of Denver, they take down sandwiches and

water and some items of clothing and they pass those out on the streets and they just simply minister and display the love of Jesus in His name. You can be a part of that ministry. We have a ministry to orphans that we're a part of here at the church. There are a lot of ways that you can respond to that ministry as well. We have a ministry to single moms. I don't know if you realize this or not, but one of the highest categories of people living in poverty in our nation today are single moms. Maybe you can respond to that. We need people to help our single moms. We had a guy came forward last night, said, "You know what? I'm an optometrist. I can provide some eye exams." We need that kind of thing. We need somebody to say, "You know what? Maybe I can fix a car, or change some oil, or do some minor repairs around the house." If you want to be a part of this, I want to encourage you to go by the MOVE wall in the lobby, all of these ministries are represented there today and you can sign up and say, "I want to be Jesus with skin on. I want to learn to display the love of Jesus to people who are in need."

We have SECOR, Southeast Community Outreach, and SECOR runs a food bank out of the church here every single week; we're feeding people in this area. Maybe you can provide some food to go out to those who are in need right here in our own community. We have our Christmas outreach through SECOR that's coming up and you can watch for ways that you can participate as we help children around the city at Christmas time. There are a lot of different ways that you can get involved. But I think the call of God to every single one of us is don't sit there, don't simply come to church, don't simply worship or go to a small group. Do something with your faith. Do something real, something tangible that can make a difference in the lives of people.

You know, there is a statement that I heard in a message a couple of months ago and it's just kind of been ringing around in my mind over and over again, and it's this: If your church were suddenly taken out of the community, who would care? Who'd care? If it's only the people that go to your church and say, "Ah, I don't have a place to worship anymore, and our kids don't have a place to go to youth group," then you're probably not doing what a church should be doing. I believe God is saying to us as a church, it's time to step it up. It's time to move to some new levels in our outreach, to be involved. I don't know if you realize this or not, but during this whole process, as I was kind of walking through all of this stuff, one of the things God's led us to do is to hire two missions pastors. We'd gone looking for one; we really believed God had wanted us to hire two because we believe we're supposed to step up this whole outreach that were doing as a church. We have two people on staff now who are just heading this up, trying to get

people involved for ministry and service and really reaching out to meet these needs. I want to encourage you today, stop by and do that. Friends, here's the bottom line, you and I? We are the church, and we are for the world. Let's go make a difference in Jesus' name. Let's bow your heads and close your eyes and let's just spend a moment in prayer as we wrap this up today.

God, as we have gone through Your Word today we just see the incredible heart that You have for people who are in need. I pray that You would help us to see those needs through Your eyes and hear those cries through Your heart. That God, we would be people who don't just know about You, but people who know You and love You and it's really evident in the way that we love those around us who are in need. God, I pray today for all of the children that will be sponsored by this church through Compassion, that God, through this releasing a child from poverty in Jesus' name, that You make a difference in the lives of these children, You make a difference in our lives as well. God, I pray for these ministries that we've just talked about, that in increasing numbers as a church we would get involved and that we would do things to minister to those who need. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.