



## WEEK 5 : "PRAY FAITHFULLY"

Sunday, August 30, 2009

### BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

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### Introducing the 50:50 Studies

We will be following the 50:50 themes in the five Sundays in August. This 5 week teaching and study program helps churches and individuals seek God's view on the poor and sets out practical ways that Christians can respond and make a difference. Each Sunday's teaching session is supplemented by linked Small Group Studies during the week.

These Studies have been prepared by the Australian staff of Baptist World Aid to celebrate 50 years of working on behalf of Australian Baptists with the world's poor, helping them to life themselves out of extreme poverty.

Check out Baptist World Aid Australia's website at [www.shareanopportunity.org](http://www.shareanopportunity.org) and click on the 50:50 graphic on the home page of our website to go straight to the 50:50 website to explore the information, links and resources there as well.

### 1. "TEACH US TO PRAY"

Two of the things that Jesus specifically taught his disciples to pray for are:

#### A. That God's WILL to be done on earth.

As indicated at the start of last week's study, both the Old and New Testaments emphasis God's concern for the poor. This passage from Isaiah present this concern clearly:

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen - only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice ... to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? **Isaiah 58:5-6**

We may be sure that addressing the needs of the poor is a PART of God's will "to be done on earth" and therefore anything to do with alleviating poverty is a LEGITIMATE subject for prayer.

Prayer: reflects a worldview that sees God as ACTIVE in the world he created  
calls on him to OVERTURN evil and injustice and BRING hope into people's lives.

#### B. The Provision Of Our DAILY bread.

Bread was the usual component of a meal in even the poorest house in Jesus' day. So a prayer for "daily bread" was then quite literally a prayer for bread! But the phrase "daily bread" can be understood as a SYMBOL of all of the basic necessities of life.

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe him ... **Isaiah 56:7**

Again, the passage from Isaiah sets out what these basic necessities include:

FOOD, CLOTHING, SHELTER

Our prayer support for the poor, should therefore include the provision for them of the things we take for granted.

(We need to remind ourselves that our prayers alone are not sufficient:

If anyone has material possessions & sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ... let us not love with words ... but with actions. **1Jn3:17-18**)

## 2. BARRIERS (then and now) TO PROVIDING "DAILY BREAD"

Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from across the Jordan followed him.

**Mark 4:25** When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. **Mark 7:28, 29**

These verses "bookend" Jesus' teaching what we know as The Lord's Prayer. It is obvious that the crowd, for the most part, was made up of ordinary people who faced great difficulty in putting "daily bread" on the table.

To know precisely how we should pray for the poor, it is helpful to consider the circumstances of these poorer people who struggled under oppressive governance from their own officials and leaders and from the occupying Roman powers. Their situation then, is reproduced in the lives of the poor today.

**A. ENVIRONMENTAL factors.** Poorer people live in substandard housing that is least able to withstand the forces of nature. They rely on each season's crops and rarely have anything in reserve for difficult times such as even a mild and localised famine. Their society is also ill-equipped in every way, not only to guard against disaster, but to help in the midst of it or to repair the damage after the event.

**B. SICKNESS:** Much of Jesus' ministry was to the sick - particularly to those who as a consequence were "outcasts" from society (Lepers) or who were forced to survive by begging. (the blind and crippled.)

**C. MILITARY Oppression.** Whilst generally well-disciplined, Roman soldiers could (and did) abuse their power. Listen to John the Baptist's reply to a soldier's question:

Some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely." **Luke 3:14**

**D. CORRUPT Officials** using their power to line their own pockets. John the Baptist again provides a window on their abuse:

Tax collectors also came to be baptised. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. **Luke 3:13**

**E. INJUSTICE in the courts.**

Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers." **Mark 12:38-40** (see also Luke 18:1-8)

**F. INDIFFERENCE** by those who could make a difference.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. **Luke 16:19-21**

## 3. SPECIFICS

To pray for the poor then is to pray that the poor will be able to meet their daily needs and for the just, equitable and compassionate social and economic order that enables this to occur. Our prayers will at least include:

- A. Access to the financial and infrastructure resources necessary to cope with environmental challenges and to recover from disaster
- B. Access to clean water, sanitation, nutritious food and decent housing
- C. Community formation, so that strong social bonds are formed and communities become safe places to live
- D. An end to oppression and injustice, including the removal and replacement or repentance of those who act oppressively, and the creation of just economic and social institutions
- E. Generosity on the part of the more wealthy in their communities (and on our part also)

## AN EXERCISE TODAY

**COMMITMENT:** To Pray for the poor, faithfully, regularly.

**EDUCATION:** Read the literature that comes periodically from Baptist World Aid ... or other Aid Agency of your choice. Keep your eyes open as you read newspapers etc.