

Wisdom Seeking Understanding

We live in a world today where there's much anger and division between political parties in Washington D.C., as well as vitriolic language regularly spewed out toward others in cities and hamlets all over this nation. The rhetoric has been elevated to such a fever pitch that civility in our conversations and honest care for others is often woefully lacking. How do we properly care for—both *physically and spiritually*—those who find themselves helpless, hurting and in dire straits?

Most Christians will have heard of the names of Francis and Edith Schaeffer. After Francis Schaeffer had graduated from Seminary and began his first pastorate, he and Edith lived in a small town near the railroad tracks. Edith records that, "often.....rather derelict-looking older men, unshaven and ragged of clothing, who travelled by riding on the bottom of freight cars, or hidden inside an empty one, came to our back door, asking, 'Cup of coffee, ma'am, and maybe some bread?'" Edith would always say, "Wait a minute," as she went back inside the house to prepare something for them to eat. She had a small tray on which she would place a sandwich or some left-over soup on a, "lovely dinner plate" with everything arranged neatly and orderly. Her children would help her fix a tiny bouquet of flowers and she would include a small copy of the Gospel of John to read as he ate. Her intention was never *only* to meet the *physical* need but also the *spiritual*. The Schaeffer's oldest daughter, Priscilla, remembers one particular time when she excitedly asked her mommy what the man at their door would think when he saw all this. To which Edith replied, "He may realize we care something about him as a person, and that's important."

As Priscilla held the screen door open, Edith carried the tray out to the man who was waiting, a man who looked shabby and downcast as if the entire world was on his shoulders.

Priscilla remembered watching his surprised face light up when he saw the tray. "For *me*? Is this for me?" To which Edith replied, "Yes and the coffee will be ready in a minute." In commenting on her desire to show Christian love toward those in need Edith Schaeffer writes, "Often one is asked, 'How does one get children to have compassion and love for others?' One important way is by demonstrating compassion and love in action, not just talking about it."

Psalms 41 addresses the fact that God wants us to help the poor, the weak and the downcast because that's what *He* does. To *rightly* help others *honors God* and emulates his character. Allow me to set this Psalm in its proper context. This Psalm would have been sung when *God's people* gathered corporately for worship. As we'll see when we get further in the text, the teaching from the Psalm is initially applicable to God's people (e.g., see Galatians 6:10). Secondly, along with the people of God, if we're going to help *anyone* over the long haul, we must be intentional in seeking to discover the root cause of their ongoing *physical* needs. And yet, our focus

is *never* to be *only* on the *physical*. We're not body only, we're body *and* soul. Given the fact that God created us, there's always a *spiritual* component to every problem we face in life. By using the phrase "Wisdom Seeking Understanding" as the title of this article,

I want to call attention to our need to *wisely* seek to *understand* the deeper issues of those who are hurting (e.g., Pr. 4:7; Matt. 5:3).

—Considering the Poor

This Psalm begins with a pronounced blessing that reminded the gathered people of God who should be the recipients of his blessing: "Blessed is *the one who considers the poor!*" This is an important statement, but how are we to understand it?

1). The word translated "poor" can also mean "weak, powerless, low," or even, "helpless." This is not, necessarily, a financial issue. This *can be any of us at any given time!* We can be experiencing *spiritual* weakness or oppression and feeling very helpless in our own particular situation.

2). Let me expand this a little further. The Hebrew verb translated "considers" carries the meaning of seeking to "wisely understand the real issue or the real problem" in any given situation. The idea here is that we're to give careful *consideration* to a person's needs and how we might *best* help them in order to address their *physical* as well as their *spiritual* needs. In thinking about the larger principle that comes into play when we're "considering the poor," we would do well to remember the compassionate words of Edith Schaeffer: "He may realize we care something about him as a person, and that's important."

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