

Principles of assisting the needy in the church

God expects us to assist the needy. Over 2000 verses in the Bible emphasise assisting the poor and the needy. Now we can't meet all the needs in the world, but it is imperative that we assist those in the church, even if we can't meet every need that they may have. However, there are principles involved in doing that.

1 Timothy 5:3-16 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. ⁴ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. ⁵ The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. ⁶ But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. ⁸ Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

⁹ No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, ¹⁰ and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

¹¹ As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. ¹² Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. ¹³ Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to. ¹⁴ So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. ¹⁵ Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

¹⁶ If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

1) God's heart for the needy

- God's heart for the needy – both spiritual as well as material needy – permeates the Bible.
- Caring for the needy isn't a specific Old Testament or a New Testament concept, but both as God is the same God throughout and His heart is revealed throughout scripture.
- Many think that their religious practices delight God, yet in fact they are detestable to Him if the needy are overlooked.
 - Isaiah 58:3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.
 - Isaiah 58:6-7 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
 - James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.
- It's easy to come to church, sing worship songs, pray, listen to the Word, have fellowship, and then go home.
 - Nothing makes us more uncomfortable than someone who rocks our world by being needy
 - James 2:15-17 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- When God separates the sheep and the goats on the day of judgement, He's going to judge according to how we served the needy
 - Matthew 25:34-36 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

2) Qualifications for assistance in the church

- Really in need and has no one else to help them, but the church
 - 1 Timothy 5:3 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.
- If they have family who can help them, then they shouldn't ask the church for assistance
 - 1 Timothy 5:4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.
 - 1 Timothy 5:8 Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
- If the person doesn't have family who can assist her, but has someone else who cares for her, then let that person take care of their needs rather than ask the church for assistance
 - 1 Timothy 5:16 If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.
- The person loves God
 - 1 Timothy 5:5 The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.
- They are of good character
 - 1 Timothy 5:9-10 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.
- Bad character disqualifies a person from receiving assistance
 - 1 Timothy 5:13 They get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to.
 - 1 Timothy 5:15 Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

3) The heart of assistance

- There will always be the poor and needy amongst us
 - Deuteronomy 15:11 There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.
- Don't prioritise the poor over Jesus, even though loving Jesus means that we will be generous to the poor
 - Matthew 26:11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.
- Loving God leads to loving people in practical ways.