[Should Movement Catalysts Help People in Financial Distress?](https://www.dmmsfrontiermissions.com/should-help-financial-distress/)

By [C. Anderson](https://www.dmmsfrontiermissions.com/author/dmmsfrontiermi/) on [Sunday, October 4, 2020](https://www.dmmsfrontiermissions.com/2020/10/)

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It is tricky. How do you love people well, without giving to their financial needs? **Our words must not be empty**. We don’t want to say “*I’ll pray for you,*” and do nothing practical to help those in true financial distress. At the same time, if we give in the wrong way, we create [unhealthy dependency](https://fivestonesglobal.org/). This is a [death factor in movements](http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/current) and can destroy the chances you will multiply rapidly.

**As you reach out to the least, last, and lost, inevitably you will encounter those with desperate needs**. These needs are emotional, physical, and spiritual. A disciple maker needs to [avoid burn-out](https://missionarylife.org/2019/06/07/dangers-doing-god-sized-tasks/) by setting boundaries on what they will do for those they minister to. How much do you give? When do you give? How do you give? These are vital questions to answer as you attempt to start [Disciple Making Movements](https://www.dmmsfrontiermissions.com/disciple-making-movement-what-defined/) among the unreached.

**What Did Jesus Do About Financial Distress?**

In everything we do as disciple makers, we look first to Jesus as our model. How did He handle desperate need? Our principles on this must be more than good strategy. They need to come from Scripture.

**Reading through the gospels, I don’t see Jesus creating huge feeding programs or building hospitals. He didn’t appeal to His home synagogue in Nazareth to finance the feeding of the hungry 5,000.**

***C. Anderson***

I’m not saying those things are wrong to do. We just don’t see Jesus doing ministry that way. A few years back I faced a difficult situation.

**Paresh’s Heart**

We were working in the slums of India. Each day we went house to house weighing babies, giving nutrition counseling, and meeting lost people. As we went, we shared stories of the Bible with those we met. When people were open, we invited them to hear more and started Discovery Story Groups.

One day in a particular slum, we came across a very sick little boy. His name was Paresh. He was four or five years old. His father was a cycle rickshaw driver who drank a lot. We noticed his emaciated body and skinny legs and arms. “What is wrong?” we asked. From the dark corners of their bamboo shack his mother pulled out a file with soiled x-ray reports.

*We sometimes gave small gifts to the kids in the slums at Christmas time.*

In India, people keep their own hospital files and records. Very few hospitals maintain files on patients, especially those from poor communities. The reports on the scans and tests were all in English. His parents didn’t speak English and only knew what they’d been told by the doctors. That wasn’t much. They’d been prescribed medicine they couldn’t afford and sent home.

**Little Paresh’s situation seemed serious.** I offered to go with them to the government hospital to investigate further. At least I could interact with the doctor in English and ask more questions. I’d often played *the role of advocate* for those in the slums. Since I was of higher status, well-educated, and had more money, they got better care if I accompanied them.

I spent long hours away from my own kids to wait in long lines at the government hospital. I was frustrated. How much time would I need to stand in line so we could see a doctor? I could afford to take them to a private hospital and pay for it or make an appeal to donors to help this little boy. That would save precious time.

*If I chose to do that, how long would I need to provide for Paresh? What about all the other kids in the slum who also needed medical care?* It was not easy to know what to do.

**Trip to Kolkata**

Eventually, I took little Paresh and his father to a heart hospital in Kolkata. We did further investigations. He had a heart defect and needed surgery. Appealing to the hospital to discount his bills, we were able to schedule appointments. We prayed and asked God to heal, but no miracle came.

The operation he needed would cost more than a year’s wage for his father. Paresh was an only son. This is a big deal in India. Many parents will sell all they have to save their son’s lives, going into massive debt for medical care. I hated to see them do that.

There were friends in the USA I knew would be willing to pay for the surgery. What would that do to the community? To our image there? **Would we now be seen as the “saviors” instead of them seeing Jesus as the One who heals and provides?**

**Praying For a Miracle**

Praying a lot, we chose a middle path. We did raise some funds to help him have more tests. **Mostly, we cried out to God for a miracle.** We read stories from the Bible with them, those which spoke of God’s healing power.

One day we got a call. “C*ome quickly,*” they said. We rushed to the slum and found little Paresh had breathed his last. Crying with the parents, we wrapped his body in a cloth and carried him to the river. Singing songs to God, we talked to them of the hope we have in Christ. **Little Paresh was with Jesus now.**

Questions filled my mind. *Could*we have done more? *Should*we have done more? *Why*didn’t God heal him? These are the kinds of situations we face when we choose to make disciples among the poor. There are no easy answers.

**Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.**

***Luke 6:30 NIV.***

**8 Principles For Helping (Or Not Helping) Those in Financial Distress**

**1. Jesus taught us to give.**

We can not make disciples who are generous unless we ourselves practice generosity. Though Jesus taught this, we do not see Him or His disciples giving money to those in need. Peter and John, when asked for alms at the temple gate responded “Silver and gold we don’t have.” (Acts 3).

Was Jesus generous? Indeed, He was. The Master’s generosity, however, was not monetary. He gave His very life.

**2. Giving is not only financial.**

There are many ways to show love to the poor. One of the greatest gifts we can give is dignity. Giving hand-outs from a place of superiority disempowers the poor. It’s often the solution that seems easiest and least costly. It also takes away our sense of guilt. And, it’s what they seem to want from us. **Giving money is often not the best thing to do.** Not if you want to help them in a long-term way.

When we give time to help a poor person find a job or learn a trade this requires generosity. If we help them learn how to navigate the difficult maze of getting government help, this empowers them.

**3. Point people to Jesus as Savior.**

Don’t rescue people. It’s not your job. Love them, serve them and point them to the God who is able to save them. He is the One who saves us not only from our sins but also from our financial burdens. He can do miracles we can not do.

**4. Let God carry the burden of the poor.**

This burden of taking care of everyone is too heavy for you. It will burn you out. Pray seriously, then give the weight of these needs to God. Trust Him to care for those you love. Believe for miracles. Let God be the One who takes care of them as they look to Him.

**5. Discern the difference between relief and development.**

There is an important distinction between these two. When a crisis like an earthquake or flood occurs, we need to help people. Often this involves finances if we have it to give. Once the crisis is over, development is needed. Don’t continue in crisis mode or you will quickly create unhealthy dependency.

**6. Live simply, and demonstrate dependency on God.**

Our lifestyles need to be simple but healthy. If you live a lavish lifestyle, it is difficult to disciple people in financial accountability. Make choices that reflect the Kingdom of God. **Just because you have more, doesn’t mean you should buy more.**Invest, save, and be responsible when God blesses you. Give sacrificially to God’s work, but avoid using your money in ways that give you control over others. *Let your disciples see that you too are trusting God for your financial needs.*

**7. Pray and believe God for miracles.**

Pray often with faith for miracles. God will work! He loves to respond to our faith-filled prayers. As people around you see God work, they too will learn to trust Him for the impossible.

**8. Involve the community.**

Don’t rob them of a chance to participate in giving. If you are an outsider (which we often are as leaders and missionaries), **avoid solving a problem that should be solved by the local community.**

Instead, serve as a partner helping them brainstorm options and solutions. If they solve their own issues or assist their own community members, you have taken important steps forward. You are moving toward an [*indigenous*](https://www.dmmsfrontiermissions.com/disciple-making-movement-what-defined/)Disciple Making Movement.

***Which of the above principles do you currently practice? Which do you need to work on?***