

Children in Poverty: Can You See Them? A Bible study series

The Children in Poverty Bible study series is a free, web-based series of Bible studies on the three-year mission study focus on Children in Poverty of American Baptist Women's Ministries, ABCUSA. It supplements materials on the same focus also being produced by National Ministries, ABCUSA.

A new study will be available every two months. Each study has two parts, enabling you to spread out each study over a period of time or to use it in one session as your schedule allows. Each study also has a variety of suggested action steps to take. These are to help spur your thinking about practical, hands-on things you can do related to children in poverty. You may do these action steps as written, or allow them to inspire you to other things.

Please begin and end your study with prayer. If you are studying in a group, read each section aloud and then stop and share your thoughts; if you are using this study as an individual, use the section marked "Reflection" to jot a few of your thoughts down.

In either case, consider designating a special journal for this study, perhaps one with pockets to hold things you may print off the web or other research as you progress through the study.

May God be with you in your study.

Session 4: 2 Kings 5:1-14

1 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. 2 Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." 4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. 5 "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy." 7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!" 8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." 11 But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage. 13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

Part One A Little Child Shall Lead Them (2 Kings 5:1-8)

The text begins with Naaman, the commander in the army of Aram and an enemy of Israel. He is highly regarded for his military prowess, but he is also afflicted with leprosy. As part of the spoils of war, his family has acquired a young girl captured from Israel during a raid on her village. She is a slave in the household, but apparently she has connected emotionally to the family of this well-respected man for she suggests a cure for the physical affliction he has. The young slave girl tells her mistress, and she in turn tells her husband, and so Naaman's journey to health begins.

Too often we see children in poverty as anchored in the problems, rather than being a part of the solution. Perhaps this story of Naaman's slave can teach us differently. This young slave girl was definitely impoverished—no family, no finances, no future as a free woman. And yet, she was not bankrupt. She had knowledge of the world beyond the home where she currently resided. She had a heart that could feel compassion for even her enemy. She had a willing spirit, ready to risk rebuke in order to accomplish a goal. Even in her poverty, this child had gifts of great worth to share with others.

This continues to be true. For example, UNICEF has invited children in Madagascar to partner with them as they reach out to poor girls who are at risk of dropping out of school. According to their website, first-grade girls who are at risk are “paired with ‘big sisters’ from the fourth and fifth grades, who sign pledges to support their younger peers. The girls walk to school, play during recess, and do their homework together. The ‘big sisters’ advise the younger girls on hygiene and social skills, and work on building their confidence in the classroom.” (http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/madagascar_26048.html)

Reflection:

Action Steps:

- Go to http://www.nationalministries.org/children/docs/Pebble_2004_v3n2.pdf. Read the articles on pages 6 and 7 and think of your own examples of children helping others. Spend some time journaling/discussing answers to the questions found in the “Pebbles to Ponder” sidebar on page 6.
- Visit the Kids' Corner on the UNICEF site to learn about programs that are specially designed to encourage children to help other children in need. <http://www.unicef.ie/kids-helping-kids.htm>
- Check out the 4-H site <http://www.4hkidshelpingkids.com/> and find out more about another program for Kids Helping Kids.
- Watch for ways the children in your community provide leadership, service, and inspiration to those around them. Try to find at least one example a week.
- Before you move onto the second half of this study, compose a prayer of thanksgiving for the children you have observed and read about. Begin with thanks for Naaman's slave girl and her modeling of compassionate intervention, and go on from there. You can even post your prayers on the Children in Poverty Message Forum at <http://www.abwministries.org/forums/>.

Part Two

A Small Obedience Produces Big Results (2 Kings 5:9-14)

When Naaman finally arrives at Elisha's home seeking a cure for his leprosy, the prophet does not even come out to him. Instead Elisha sends a slave to tell Naaman to go wash in the Jordan River seven times and he'll be cured. But Naaman's personal pride is strong. He feels the prophet should have come out to him. And his national pride is also engaged. If washing in water would cleanse leprosy, surely the waters of his home area would be better than any waters in Israel! His pride fuels his anger, and he refuses to respond to such a simplistic solution to his serious illness. Fortunately for Naaman, he has loyal servants who long for him to find health and wholeness. One of those servants comes to reason with him and help him obey the simple command. And when Naaman does obey, life changes dramatically. His flesh is clean, "like that of a young boy."

The issue of children in poverty is an extremely complex one. It requires responses from many directions at personal, communal, and systemic levels. You may feel overwhelmed as you learn more about children in poverty and the needs to be addressed. You long for health and wholeness for the children, but perhaps you have not acted in ways that seem significant to you. Remember that a small obedience can produce large results. You don't have to write *all* the letters to your senator, only one. You don't have to feed every child, but you can feed some. You don't have to be the only one to turn out to discuss a school board measure, but you can be one who does. The choice is up to you.

Where is God calling you to immerse yourself as you seek health and wholeness for children in poverty? What stands in the way of your small obedience? Is it pride? Is it prejudice? Is it nationalism? Is it cynicism? Spend some time this month identifying the barriers to obedience in your life. Discuss/journal about them. Prayerfully ask God to help you break down the barriers and wade into the water!

Reflection:

Action Steps:

Spend time this month on the Stop Child Poverty site, seeking ways that God is calling you to a "small" obedience.

- Get inspired as you read about Ana Dodson, an 11-year-old girl who took a small step of obedience that yielded great results. She now has her own non-profit organization to help orphans in Peru. Visit <http://www.stopchildpoverty.org/learn/bigpicture/people/>.
- Pick one of the suggestions on the "Day to Day" page and make it a reality in your life. Do it alone or work with others in your study group to take action and effect change. Visit <http://www.stopchildpoverty.org/live/daytoday/>.
- Spend time on the Stop Child Poverty message board. You can just "lurk" and read what others have written or you can log in and join the discussion. Either way, you are sure to learn something that will change you. Visit <http://www.stopchildpoverty.org/pass/discuss/>.