

JAMLAC's CORE VALUES:

- Dignity
- Empowerment
- Gratitude
- Integrity
- Hope
- Humility
- Justice
- Mercy
- Respect
- Servant Leadership
- Equity, Inclusion and Diversity

GOD'S HEART FOR THE POOR AND THE CHRISTIAN LAWYER

(This document was compiled by Steve Thompson when JAMLAC was a dream. Steve was going to law school to defend the poor but didn't know how that would come to fruition.)

From beginning to end the Bible, the book we Christians profess to be the final authority for faith and practice, teaches that **God has a special active concern for the poor and that He calls His people to join him in that concern.** Following is an outlined sampling of this central teaching of scripture. Specifically, the Scriptures contain direct and passionate calls for **the people of God to defend the cause of the poor and oppressed.**

I. The Pentateuch

Exodus 6:5-7:

Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians."

Exodus 23:6: **Do not deny justice to poor people in their lawsuits.**

Leviticus 25:35-37:

If any of your own people become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you. Do not take interest or any profit from them, but fear your God, so that your poor neighbors may continue to live among you. You must not lend them money at interest or sell them food at a profit. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.

Deuteronomy 24:17-22:

You shall not pervert the **justice** due an alien or an orphan nor take a widow's garment in pledge but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing. When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you bat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again, it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.

Yahweh wanted His people to know him as the One who freed them from slavery and Oppression--literal slavery and oppression. The LORD commanded laws in business and agriculture which favored the poor

*This is used as an example in the law and portrays at the outset of God's relationship with His redeemed people-- **that they are to care for the alien, the widow, the poor and oppressed.***

II. Poetry and Wisdom Literature

Throughout the Psalms and Proverbs there are unambiguous statements concerning God's concern for the poor and the call for His people to be concerned for the poor.

Psalm 9:9

The Lord is a refuge for the **oppressed**, a stronghold in times of trouble.

Psalm 10:17-18

You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, **defending the fatherless and the oppressed**, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.

Psalm 14:6

You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, **but the Lord is their refuge.**

Psalm 35:10

My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, O Lord? **You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them.**"

Psalm 72:12-14

For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.

Psalm 74:19-21

Do not hand over you dove to wild beasts;
Do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever.
Have regard for your covenant,
Because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land.
Do not let the oppressed retreat In disgrace;
May the poor and needy praise your name.

Psalm 82:2-4

***Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.
Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.***

Psalm 103:6

The Lord works righteousness and ***justice for all the oppressed.***

Psalm 103:6

The Lord works righteousness
And justice for all the oppressed.

Psalm 113:7

He raises the poor from the dust
And lifts u the needy from the ash heap.

Proverbs 14:31

He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors him.

Proverbs 19:17

He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.

Proverbs 21:13

If a person shuts their ears to the cry of the poor, they too will cry out and not be answered.

Proverbs 22:22-23

Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and ***do not crush the needy in court***, for the Lord will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them.

Proverbs 28:27

He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses.

Proverbs 29:7

The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

Proverbs 31:9

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

III. The Prophets

Jeremiah 22:16. Speaking of King Josiah the prophet Jeremiah says:

“He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me? Declares the Lord.”

Micah 6:8. Speaking against the ***injustice*** in Israel and the attempt to buy God’s favor with sacrifice God says through the prophet:

He has showed you what is good and what does the Lord require of you?
to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

In as clear an indictment as one can imagine the God of the Bible tells his people that piety absent a concern for the poor is empty ritual:

Isaiah 1:17

Learn to do right; seek justice.
Defend the oppressed.
Take up the cause of the fatherless;
Plead the case of the widow.

Isaiah 1:23

Your rulers are rebels,

Partners with thieves;
They all love bribes
And chase after gifts
They do not defend the cause of the fatherless
The widow's case does not come before them.

Isaiah 58

Shout it aloud, do not hold back, Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask for *just decisions* and seem eager for God to come near them.

Why have we fasted, they say, and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves and you have not noticed? . . . Is this the kind of fasting I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? 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* 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 cloth him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. . .

Then you will find your joy in the Lord . . .

Isaiah 61:1-3:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
Because the Lord has anointed me
To proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
 To proclaim freedom for the captives
 And release from darkness for the prisoners,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Jubilee)
 And the day vengeance of our God,
To comfort all who mourn
 And to provide for those who grieve in Zion—
To bestow upon them a crown of beauty
 Instead of ashes,
The oil of joy
 Instead of mourning,
And garments of praise
 Instead of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
 A planting of the Lord
For the display of his splendor.

Isaiah 61:8-9

For I the Lord, love justice;
 I hate robbery and wrongdoing.
In my faithfulness I will reward my people
 And make an everlasting covenant with them.

God's Word teaches a very disturbing truth. Those who neglect the poor and oppressed are not God's people at all--no matter how frequently they practice their religious rituals nor how orthodox are their creeds and confessions.

--Ron Sider

Ezekiel 16:49 pinpoints the sin of Sodom:

This is the sin of your sister Sodom: her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; ***they did not help the poor and needy.***

Amos 2:6-7a, 5:12, 15

This is what the LORD says: For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. ***They trample on the heads of the poor*** as on the dust of the ground and ***deny justice to the oppressed.***

For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those ***who oppress the innocent*** and take bribes and ***deprive the poor of justice in the courts.*** . . .

Hate evil, love good; ***maintain justice in the courts.*** Perhaps the Lord God

Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

Zechariah 7:9-10

This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’

IV. The Gospels

Like the God portrayed in the Old Testament, Jesus uniquely identifies with the poor and needy and exhibits and emphasizes active concern for the poor.

A. As a unique emphasis in the Gospel of Luke:

By the forerunner—John the Baptizer: Luke 3:7-14

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘we have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. . . .

“What should we do then? The crowd asked. John answered “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?” “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” “He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

At the outset of his Jesus’ public ministry: Luke 4:18-21

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the ***Jubilee Justice**** (the Lord’s favorable year).

**Jubilee Justice is a translation borrowed from Lowell Noble in his fine book From Oppression to Jubilee Justice.*

In answer to the question from an Expert in the Law: Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and Love your neighbor as yourself.

“You have answered correctly” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothing, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denari and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ Which of these do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “the one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

In pronouncing woes on the Pharisees and Experts in the Law in Luke 11: 39-54 (excerpts)

Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But give what is inside ***you—be generous to the poor***, and everything will be clean for you. Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but ***you neglect justice and the love of God***. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

Luke 12:32-24

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ***Sell your possessions and give to the poor***, provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 14:12-14

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, ***invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.*** Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

Luke 18:18-30 Rich Young Ruler

A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. “No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.”

“All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. ***Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.*** Then come, follow me.”

When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus replied, “what is impossible with human beings is possible with God.”

Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”

B. Beautifully and powerfully in Matthew’s gospel:

Matthew 5:38-42: Sermon on the Mount

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

...***when*** you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in

the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others . . . But **when** you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing . . .

Matthew 25:31-46

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

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. 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, I needed cloths and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needed clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ the king will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

V. Pauline Epistles

A good part of Paul’s ministry was occasioned by taking a collection for the poor in Jerusalem.

II Corinthians 8:9.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Galatians 2:10:

All they asked was that we should continue to ***remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.***

Romans 12:13:

Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.

VI. The General Epistles

Uniquely an emphasis of James

James 1:9-11

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation-since they will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom fall and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

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.

James 2:14-17.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without cloths 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.

I John 3:16-17

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ***If any one of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.***

CONCLUSION:

The God of the Bible portrays an active concern for the poor and calls His people to join Him in showing this concern. This concern and call is not peripheral or adjunct. It is a main theme of Biblical teaching. So much so that people of God dare not call themselves the people of God if they fail to show a special concern for the poor.