

WHY PRAY?

HOW CAN PRAYER HELP WHEN WE ARE FACED WITH AN ISSUE LIKE GLOBAL POVERTY?

Prayer reminds us of God's priorities and power when we are dealing with big issues of justice, like poverty. When we pray, we can see the world with God's eyes of compassion and justice rather than being hopelessly cynical, fearful or naïve about global injustice. Prayer is also a wonderful reminder to those of us who want to race out and change the world, that it is God's power, God's enabling and God's mercy which make us effective. Poverty is an issue that needs action but it is vital to remember that our actions need to be built on prayer. As the Lord's Prayer puts it, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". This points to the priority of God's control but also the need for us to demonstrate God's Kingdom values on earth.

Praying about poverty needs persistence and insight. Poverty is the result of individual actions but also of structural injustice and therefore we must pray at different levels. We can pray for individuals suffering from poverty (including people and places we know) to be comforted and provided for as well as for individuals living in wealth including people and places we know) to cast off their indifference or exploitation. We must also pray for national policies which care for the poor and address injustice, for God's power to overcome injustice in international laws, multinational companies and power structures and for Godly government decisions that protect and care for the weak and vulnerable. We tend not to pray about overcoming powerful structures but examples from the Bible show God's people praying to overcome worldly power e.g. Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal, Moses defying Pharaoh.

Prayer sustains us as we seek to overcome injustice - our prayers sometimes start as laments, cried from the heart about the unfairness of suffering. But our prayers help us to avoid despair or cynicism because we are assured that our lamentations are heard.

Nehemiah is a wonderful example of a person of powerful prayer and effective, persistent action. He saw the plight of his people in Jerusalem and wanted to do something. His first response was to fast and pray, then he acted. And he acted in a way that went to the heart of the issue: that dealt with the cause of suffering and broke the power of people who stood against justice. He discerned the right way to act because his actions were grounded in prayer. This combination of spiritual power and practical wisdom is a great way to deal with poverty.

Our prayers about poverty are an attack on enemy territory because we are not just praying FOR the poor, we are praying AGAINST greed, aggression, pride and privilege. Poverty is not just a problem for poor people, it is an issue for Christians in the rich 20% of the world too - things in our lives may need to change so that our prayers can be answered!

Praying about poverty is a huge undertaking but worth it because we cannot leave 40% of the world's population in dire poverty - God calls us to pray and act as his ambassadors and partners.