

# **Leader's Guide for *Servant or Sucker?* *Wise and Compassionate Ways to Help the Poor***

## **Introduction**

We've all been there. Someone, obviously poor or homeless, approaches you and asks for money. What do you do? Do you give money knowing the person may use it to buy drugs or alcohol or do you say "no" or even ignore the person as you walk by? No one wants to be a sucker in these situations, but at the same time, Jesus' call to help the poor echoes in our hearts and minds.

*Servant or Sucker? Wise and Compassionate Ways to Help the Poor* is a five-session, small-group DVD-based study. Hosted by the Rev. Beth Lindsay Templeton, the study helps viewers discern appropriate, Christ-centered actions for addressing poverty on a personal or organizational level. It features realities of poverty, including the concepts of time, relationships, money and values; a "poverty tour"; interviews with those who are homeless or poor; interviews with those who have helped and/or have been suckered; and steps you can take to be an effective servant without getting suckered.

## **The Leader**

Templeton, an ordained Presbyterian Church USA minister, directs "Our Eyes Were Opened," an outreach program of United Ministries in Greenville, S.C. The program teaches people how to make wise and compassionate decisions for helping people in poverty. Templeton formerly served as director of United Ministries for 24 years. Through her vocation, Templeton has worked closely with people who are poor and marginalized, as well as with groups and individuals who want to help people with minimal resources.

## **About the DVD**

These sessions combine on-camera discussion by Templeton, poverty tours and on-the-street interviews with homeless people, interviews with people who have helped and/or who have been suckers, and role-playing by actors portraying begging situations. All of this information is intended to make viewers more aware of the stories people will tell when begging. It also provides "real-world," compassionate solutions on helping those who are homeless or poor without endangering or hampering their well-being or yours.

## **Before Showing**

Preview each session of the DVD before your group meets. Be sure the DVD player and the TV work properly and cue the DVD at the beginning of each session.

## **After Showing**

Each DVD closes with questions for group discussion. You may pause the DVD after each question listed on the screen. Questions are also listed at the end of the session overviews on the following pages of this guide. Also scattered throughout the guide are reproducible worksheets and exercises.

## **Session One: The Dilemma**

### **Overview**

This session starts with people telling their own stories of how they helped and/or were suckered while trying to help someone on the street. Also covered are typical requests for money and the hows and whys of our responses to those requests.

### **Bible Reference**

“There are always going to be poor and needy people among you. So I command you: Always be generous, open purse and hands, give to your neighbors in trouble, your poor and hurting neighbors.” (Deuteronomy 15:11, *The Message*)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Describe a time when you experienced conflict about helping someone.
2. Which aspects of the dilemma come to mind most often: guilt, fear, no judgment?
3. How did you respond and how did you feel about your response?

### **Additional Activities**

1. Distribute copies of the “Learning About Poverty” quiz on page 4 to class members. After members complete it, review their responses using the following information (**Note: the correct answer for every question in this quiz is “?”**):

a. Someone who has many children is poor.

Follow-up for leader:

The family may be a blended family where the mom and dad each have children from previous marriages as well as their own. Members of some cultures and religious groups have large families.

b. Someone who does not go to work every day is poor.

Follow-up for leader:

The person may work from home. The family may live on trust funds and not be required to go to work in order to survive.

c. Someone who lives in a tiny house is poor.

Follow-up for leader:

The family may choose to use their money for education or travel rather than for a big house.

d. Someone who smells bad is poor.

Follow-up for leader:

The person may have lost the sense of smell and may be unable to detect odors. The person may have an illness that puts out an odor.

e. Someone who drives an old car is poor.

Follow-up for leader:

Some families value other things more than the newest car.

f. Someone who is extremely fat or extremely thin is poor.

Follow-up for leader:

Medical conditions and body sizes vary with people.

g. A person of color is poor.

Follow-up for leader:

Tell that to Oprah Winfrey.

2. Learn the following about your community:

a. Does your community have a panhandling law? What are the parameters?

b. How many people in your community live in poverty? What is the percentage of poor people?

c. How many people are homeless in your community? Do you know where they stay at night—homeless shelters, bridges, abandoned buildings and so forth?

d. Does anyone offer a tour of blighted areas in your community? If so, could you schedule a tour for class members?

## Learning about Poverty

**Circle T, F or ? as the best answer for each statement.**

T=True; F=False; ? = Unsure

- a. Someone who has many children is poor. T F ?
  
- b. Someone who does not go to work every day is poor. T F ?
  
- c. Someone who lives in a tiny house is poor. T F ?
  
- d. Someone who smells bad is poor. T F ?
  
- e. Someone who drives an old car is poor. T F ?
  
- f. Someone who is extremely fat or extremely thin is poor. T F ?
  
- g. A person of color is poor. T F ?

## **Session Two: Why Do People Beg?**

### **Overview**

The first part of this session features a local actor who begs for money and then describes his experience and feelings doing so. The next section focuses on interviews with real panhandlers reflecting their experiences and feelings. Then, Templeton discusses the differences in bottom-line values and vocabulary for people with resources and those without resources. The session closes with interviews of a police officer and a security worker in downtown Atlanta who give their perspectives on the city's homeless situation.

### **Bible References**

“If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens.” (Leviticus 25:35, NRSV)

“If the poor are hated even by their kin, how much more are they shunned by their friends! When they call after them, they are not there.” (Proverbs 19:7, NRSV)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. If relationship is a guiding value to someone steeped in poverty, what does that say about how you should respond when approached for help?
2. Now that you have an explanation of why someone begs, are you more or less likely to give directly to a beggar? Are you more or less likely to give to organized charities?
3. What do you think about the values that guide the different classes? Are some “better” than others? How does that affect the way you act toward people with different values?

### **Additional Activity**

**Purpose:** We rarely realize how dependent we are on all kinds of people. This exercise helps us see that many other people enrich our lives in ways we often do not consider or realize.

### **Materials Needed:**

Bag of potato chips

Paper and pens (If you break into small groups, each group will need a set)

### **Instructions for Leader:**

Begin by saying: “Look at this bag of chips. Let’s think about how many people were involved in making this bag of chips available to us today.”

Ask the group to list everyone who was involved in getting this bag of chips to us. (Answers may include farmers, pickers, truckers, processors, grocers.)

Then dig further by asking: “What kinds of functions/jobs on the farm and in the potato chip factory were required in order for us to have this bag of chips?” (Answers related to the farm may include seed purchaser, mechanics who keep farm equipment running, field workers, and people who build the boxes or shipping containers. Answers related to the factory might include owner, computer engineers, mechanics who keep factory equipment running, housekeepers who keep the plant clean, chemists who develop the “recipes” and human resources people who hire

the workers. Even before that, universities will have professors who teach and students who explore ways to produce better potatoes or who become engineers to design better factory machinery. Also consider graphic artists who design the bag and advertisers who convince us that this brand of chips is the best.)

Ask: “Could as many as 100 people be involved?”

Talk about how important each person is to everyone who enjoys a bag of chips. Ask: “Do we equally value each individual involved in the process of our bag of chips? Why or why not?”

Discuss the interconnectedness of people, our caring for each other, how each person is important to our enjoyment of life and so forth.

Before closing, ask if anyone has anything else to add or has a question. Does anyone have suggestions for how we can improve our appreciation and treatment of people who are important to our livelihood, especially those we often forget?

## **Session Three: An Individual's Response**

### **Overview**

Kim Hawkins shares her story about trying to be a servant when helping a homeless couple and the frustrations that arose while trying to help. Studio actors role-play how compassionately to acknowledge people begging for money and help without giving them any money. Also addressed is how to handle an aggressive panhandler as well as the ABCs of helping:

**Acknowledge** the person has a problem. Do not **Believe** everything you hear. **Compassion** is not judged by giving people what they want.

### **Bible Reference**

Jesus answered, "The first [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Sovereign our God, the Sovereign is one; and you shall love the Sovereign your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31, *An Inclusive-Language Lectionary*)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is it important to ask for and use a person's name when you respond to them?
2. What are the pros and cons of giving money to someone?
3. If you really support a local charity, will that make it easier to say "no" on the street, or will it be just as difficult?
4. When do you think "no" would be the best and most helpful answer?

### **Additional Activity**

1. Have two group members act out this scenario: One participant is the beggar and the other participant uses the ABCs of helping. Ask the rest of the class to coach the participant using the ABCs of helping on ways to improve his or her caring and compassionate responses as he or she interacts with the beggar.

For example:

The person seeking assistance might say, "My mother is in the hospital, and I need bus fare to go visit her." The responder might then say, "I'm sorry your mother is in the hospital.

(A=Acknowledge the person has a problem.) Which hospital is she in? How long has she been there? (B=Do not believe everything you hear.)

## **Session Four: Making Compassionate Decisions**

### **Overview**

This session opens with poverty tours in Greenville, S.C. and New Haven, Conn. Templeton discusses the importance of empowering people to help themselves rather than taking over and doing the work. She also explains how poor planning on someone else's part does not constitute an emergency for her. She also suggests that when someone asks for money, look at the shoes the person is wearing; nicer shoes may indicate the person is not as needy as he or she might indicate. The session closes with the acronym "LEARN" to make compassionate decisions when helping someone: **Learn** the available resources. **Explain** the reasoning behind your answer. **Ask** appropriate questions to check the details of the story. Make good **Referrals**. **Never** explain another agency's policies unless you're sure of the information.

### **Bible Reference**

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35, NRSV)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Write a script for how you might respond to the typical request for help you encounter. What are your concerns about how well that script will work? Discuss these concerns with your group to arrive at a more complete solution.
2. List available resources in your community. Examples might include a food bank, a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, a clothes closet, a financial assistance agency and a hospital that accepts indigent patients. Your local United Way or public library may be starting places, or conduct an Internet search of your area. Social workers, nonprofit staff and community volunteers in your congregation will have insights as well. Develop a short list to print on a card no larger than a folded business card. Make copies of the card to give to people who seek help. The card's small size fits easily into a wallet or pocket.

### **Additional Activity**

Invite two group members to act out this scenario: One participant is the beggar and the other participant is the one who says "no" using the lessons of LEARN. Ask the class to coach the participant saying "no" on how to improve his or her caring and compassionate responses as he or she interacts with the beggar.

For example:

The person seeking assistance might say, "I need food." The responder might answer, "I don't give money directly on the street." (E=Explain your answer.) "However, the soup kitchen on Academy Street serves lunch between 11 a.m. and noon." (L=learn the resources and R=Referrals; make good ones.)

## **Session Five: Churches' and Organizations' Response**

### **Overview**

This session opens with a tour of United Ministries in Greenville, S.C., as well as interviews with United Ministries' staff and people who use the organization's services. Templeton then provides a series of questions for people who are part of a church or an organization to ask and answer before launching a program that responds to poverty. She discusses three Vs that will help churches and organizations operate more effectively: If your group decides to help with funds (such as paying an electric bill), always mail the check directly to the **Vendor**. **Verify** the story and the vendor's identity. Develop a **Voucher** system for food and gas.

### **Bible Reference**

**1-3** "Shout! A full-throated shout! Hold nothing back—a trumpet-blast shout!  
Tell my people what's wrong with their lives,  
face my family Jacob with their sins!  
They're busy, busy, busy at worship,  
and love studying all about me.  
To all appearances they're a nation of right-living people—  
law-abiding, God-honoring.  
They ask me, 'What's the right thing to do?'  
and love having me on their side.  
But they also complain,  
'Why do we fast and you don't look our way?  
Why do we humble ourselves and you don't even notice?'

**3-5**"Well, here's why:

"The bottom line on your 'fast days' is profit.  
You drive your employees much too hard.  
You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight.  
You fast, but you swing a mean fist.  
The kind of fasting you do  
won't get your prayers off the ground.  
Do you think this is the kind of fast day I'm after:  
a day to show off humility?  
To put on a pious long face  
and parade around solemnly in black?  
Do you call that fasting,  
a fast day that I, God, would like?

**6-9**"This is the kind of fast day I'm after:  
to break the chains of injustice,  
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,  
free the oppressed,  
cancel debts.

What I'm interested in seeing you do is:

sharing your food with the hungry,  
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,  
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,  
being available to your own families.  
Do this and the lights will turn on,  
and your lives will turn around at once.  
Your righteousness will pave your way.  
The God of glory will secure your passage.  
Then when you pray, God will answer.  
You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'

**9-10**"If you get rid of unfair practices,  
quit blaming victims,  
quit gossiping about other people's sins,  
If you are generous with the hungry  
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,  
Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,  
your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight."  
(Isaiah 58:1-10, *The Message*)

### **Discussion Question**

1. Where do we go from here?

### **Additional Activity**

Complete the evaluation of this series on the next page and mail or e-mail to:

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### **If You Want to Know More**

Portions of *Servant or Sucker? Wise and Compassionate Ways to Help the Poor* came from Templeton's book *Loving Our Neighbor: A Thoughtful Approach to Helping People in Poverty*, published in 2008. To order copies of *Loving Our Neighbor*, call 1-800-AUTHORS or visit [www.iUniverse.com](http://www.iUniverse.com), [www.BarnesandNoble.com](http://www.BarnesandNoble.com) or [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com).

### Servant or Sucker? Resource Evaluation

1. How many sessions of this series did your group watch? (Please circle) 1 2 3 4 5
2. What experience, exercise or discussion did your group find most helpful?
  
3. What do you consider the strengths of this resource?
  
  
4. What could be improved?
  
  
5. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate this resource? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Other comments

Name of Church/Group (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Group leader's e-mail address (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive future e-mailed notices about EcuFilm resources? (Check one)  
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Thank you!