

Sermon Title: **How Do I Know I'm Really Helping?**

Rev. Jon Barrett | Executive Director of CVCCS

INTRO: We live in challenging times, Amen?

Here are some surprising facts that apply to our sweet, charming, scenic community known as Lancaster County:

- 10.2% live below the poverty line in our county.
 - This stat is higher within the CV School District.
- The Central PA Food Bank distributes on average over 5.5 million pounds of food each month, more than 67 million pounds per year, through 1,000 partner agencies and programs, which includes CVCCS.

As Christ followers we are ALL called to be salt and light.

But did you know, there is a right way and a wrong way to be charitable?

At CVCCS, we've seen as a community, that in our zeal to help others believe it or not we can actually do harm to those we're trying to help.

Let's look no further than Jesus as we'll examine 3 key elements that will transcend your view of charity:

#1. Jesus used discernment.

#2. Jesus formed connections.

#3. Jesus gave expectations.

MAIN POINT: You can't meet the need unless you have a Biblical view of charity.

MAIN VERSE: JOHN 5:1-15- 1 Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [4] 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?” 7 “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” 8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” 11 But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ” 12 So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” 13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. 14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” 15 The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

#1. Jesus used discernment

Context-

LET'S GO BACK TO VERSES 1-6- Jesus asked the man a KEY question here... did you catch it? DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?

In order to truly help someone, **they have to want to be helped.**

Discernment when meeting someone's need is impossible if we don't know the context of a person's situation. It's ok to ask personal questions if someone comes to you for help!! If they can't or won't answer, that is a **RED FLAG.**

SOME RED FLAGS... BEWARE OF...

- Pushy and aggressive tactics.
- Unable to provide reputable details.
- Inconsistent story.
- Excessive playing on your emotions.
- Strange names, phone numbers, email addresses, duplicate information.
- Cash only.
- Refusing to better their situation.
- Refusing to go to a shelter as a last resort.

In John 10:6 Jesus said, "Remember it is I who am sending you out ... prove yourselves as wise as serpents, and as innocent as doves." **What does Jesus mean here?** A wise person anticipates their course of action, and then plans Biblically based strategic actions accordingly.

Ask yourself:

Does this person need RELIEF, REHABILITATION, OR DEVELOPMENT?

1. RELIEF: Meeting an urgent need. Temporary; not meant to be long term solution. Tragically, in charitable circles, most cases are treated as relief situations even if someone is not truly in need of relief.

2. REHABILITATION: Working to help them become stable. Guiding them back on track.

3. DEVELOPMENT: Working with them towards ongoing, long-term change. Getting them to a better position than before. Self-sustainability in Christ or, Biblical discipleship.

STORY ILLUSTRATION: At CVCCS we partner with an organization called The True Charity Initiative out of Joplin, MO. One of their clients admitted it was easy to take advantage of well-meaning people that lacked discernment.

As a result, they were able to continue in the cycle of destructive addictions. It's all they knew. The truth is most people feeding an addiction don't know any other way. Instead, we need to SHOW them a BETTER WAY... **the Way, the Truth, and the Life.**

Using discernment in action looks something like this:

- a. **Ask questions and investigate-** Asking questions about their situation helps establish healthy boundaries and accountability. For example- How long has this been going on? Why aren't you working? Where else have you found help in the past? Etc....

- b. **RESIST the urge to just jump in and solve the issue-** This is a HUGE struggle within charitable circles. That which is presented as a crisis RARELY IS! Don't get swept up in urgency. Step back and get the whole picture.
 - a. Back in V6 of our main text, Jesus asked the question 'DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL' **BEFORE He did ANYTHING for the man.**

MAIN POINT: You can't meet the need unless you have a Biblical view of charity.

#2. Jesus formed connections

RE-READ- VERSES 7-9- 7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "**I have no one to help me** into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." 8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath..."

Context-

Note again the man's response in V7. . . "**I have no one to help me...**"

The True Charity Initiative defines the essence of poverty this way: "Poverty is complex and is caused by a myriad of factors, but essentially comes down to **broken relationships.**" WOW. Think about that!

You and I can introduce people to something they may have never known- love, hope, stability... a BETTER way.

Like Jesus exhibited, we can be a lifeline for those starved of healthy relationships.

STORY ILLUSTRATION: There was a client that went for help at a Bible believing, Christian organization. After she successfully completed the program, she commented on what made the difference for her finally overcoming poverty and addiction...

She said for the first time in her life she experienced unconditional love, genuine people, and real relationships. As a result of seeing the Church act like the Church, she surrendered her life to Christ.

The Lord gave her a burden to help those headed down the same destructive road she was once on. Her thriving relationship with Jesus and others set Biblical discipleship in motion which acted as a domino effect.

Dr. Marvin Olasky's book, "The Tragedy of American Compassion" establishes 2 principles of charity: CHARITY WITH TONGS and CHARITY WITHOUT TONGS. It's imperative we know the difference between the 2-

- a. **Charity with tongs-** Means 'no touching.' This is contrary to how Jesus cared for those in need. It's just throwing money or band-aids at people's needs. Often-times it's so we feel good about ourselves for thinking we helped someone.
Just throwing money or putting a band-aid on a problem never solves the real issue!
- b. **Charity without tongs-** Is defined in 3 parts...

- a. **Reciprocity:** Engage in real, genuine conversation, take the time to listen intently, try to establish a connection... Sharing your story and they share theirs.
- b. **Accountability:** Speak the truth in love when trust is breached or damaged.
- c. **Boundaries:** Setting healthy limits. Did you know that truly showing unconditional love consists of setting and maintaining healthy boundaries?

NOTE: Sadly, the body of Christ and charitable organizations particularly STRUGGLE with the 'Charity without tongs' approach because it takes TIME. Your shoes may get dirty, your carpet may get stained. It's uncomfortable. **There's no quick fix.**

One more item to highlight as an addition-

A key element that often gets missed in the entire process: **Can we point the person in need back to their 'natural' relationships as long as it's not an abusive or toxic situation?**

Believe it or not, we can weaken someone's **social connections (social capital)** by our 'good intentions' to help meet their 'needs.' If possible, we should connect them back to immediate loved ones. It's possible that we can help them restore estranged or fractured relationships.

Phil. 2:4 says, "Look out for another's interests, not just for your own."

Jesus said in Mat. 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Ask questions and do some investigating: Where is your family? Do you have friends or neighbors who should be aware of what's going on?

MAIN POINT: You can't meet the need unless you have a Biblical view of charity.

#3. Jesus gave expectations

RE-READ- VERSES 10-15- 10 and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." 11 But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" 12 So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" 13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. 14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." 15 The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Context-

Verse 14 is often taken out of context, inferring that Jesus required sinless perfection from the man. The entirety of Scripture refutes this, as only Jesus was sinless. The proper context is Jesus gave the man **accountability and expectations**.

ACCOUNTABILITY IS GOOD!

It's NOT ungodly to have expectations of people! However, in many charitable circles today this is not a popular view because charity is often conditioned with entitlement. It's NOT unloving to

expect people to do their part. Just the opposite. It's cruel to send the message that a person has nothing of worth to offer. Being needed is the ultimate affirmation of human worth.

Establishing dignity is powerful. Expectation implicitly communicates worth and trust.

STORY ILLUSTRATION: The True Charity Initiative described another client who was involved in a program called 'The Worth Shop.' This program allows clients to work at their facility in exchange for a week's worth of food. Instead of a handout, this exchange preserves dignity and awakens worth in people, while also making a small break in the cycle of dependency that traps so many.

This particular client paired up with a volunteer from 'The Worth Shop' to make jewelry. The jewelry is sold to further the mission. As a result, she earned food for the week. She described the experience by saying, "I didn't know there was something I could still do."

The LORD Himself is... Compassionate, just, **and expectant.**

Like everything else with God's character, these things work in conjunction with each other, and are NOT contradictory.

Isa. 30:18- The LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!

Jas. 5:11b- The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Pro. 22:22-23- Do not exploit the poor because they are poor... for the LORD will take up their case and will exact life for life.

Eze. 22:29- The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the foreigner, denying them justice.

Deu. 30:2-3- ...when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

Lest we forget, remember where the true struggle lies in all of what we're talking about today... Paul notes to the Church in Ephesus in **Eph. 6:12**, that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood..."

Our battle is not primarily physical or tangible but spiritual and unseen. The spiritual addresses the hidden root causes which is why the devil does not want anyone getting out of destructive cycles such as dependency.

MAIN POINT: You can't meet the need unless you have a Biblical view of charity.

Today, we looked at 3 key elements from Jesus showing how to properly meet charitable needs, Biblically:

- #1. Jesus used discernment
- #2. Jesus formed connections

- #3. Jesus gave expectations

AND AGAIN, **THE MAIN POINT:** You can't meet the need unless you have a Biblical view of charity.

Bibliography:

True Charity Initiative, Joplin, MO

Statistics courtesy of Central PA Food Bank.