



Ministering to the Poor ...WHAT A BORE

"I learned something

on this mission trip. I am a very selfish person. I went to Jamaica to help the poor, and I ended up being helped. It took so little to make them happy. They weren't afraid to work—in fact, they worked circles around us. Though they had very little, they always gave to others. Maybe it's us Americans who think we have so much who are really the poor ones. Poverty is cruel and ugly, but wealth has its ugliness, too."

Melinda, 14

The Stats

In 1991 half of all American 12-to-17-year-olds gave to charity. In 1995 only 41% of them gave, according to a Gallup survey of 800 foundations and corporate giving programs.

The Joplin Globe
December 11, 1996

By the Book...

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

Matthew 23:15

"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 will also 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, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

Matthew 25:42-45

With \$30,000 in the bank that they had raised during the previous year, the youth group was making its final plans to travel to Mexico and build 10 houses for the poor. But Melanie and James wouldn't have any part of it. Why spend \$30,000 to build houses for people in a foreign country, they said, when our own country has thousands, hundreds of thousands of homeless? We should take care of our people first before we take care of other people.

The other kids in the youth group didn't like what Melanie and James were saying. First of all, if you build a house in America, you have to build it to code. Building a house in Mexico is more like building a garage—no electricity, no water, but it's still warm, dry, adequate shelter from rain and cold. Besides, to build a home in the U.S. would cost 15 to 30 times as much as it would in Mexico.

In fact, the whole youth group was angry with Melanie and James for causing this split among them. The two teenagers were even dividing the adults in the church, and the other kids feared that if this kept up, soon nothing would be built and nobody would be helped. Besides, if Melanie and James were so concerned about the homeless in the U.S., then why weren't they helping them? They weren't doing anything for the homeless except arguing that they should be helped instead of Mexican families. The entire church was polarized over the issue.

After a lengthy meeting, the church board decided to cancel the Mexico trip, to have no project this year, and instead take the year to find a project that could involve everyone. During the next several months 15 families left the church over the issue, Melanie and James moved out of town, and when it came time a year later to do a summer project, it never happened.

1. Do you agree with James and Melanie that we should help the poor in our country before we help the poor in other countries?

2. Who is mostly to blame for the cancellation of the project and for two years of no service project?

3. If you were on the church board, what solution would you have suggested?

