

Ministry Resources

The following resources are helpful in the development of the Angel Tree Mentoring ministry. These resources are also used when introducing the concept of the Angel Tree Mentoring ministry to others. The documents included in this unit are:

- Prison Fellowship Statement of Faith
- Angel Tree Mentoring Website
- Angel Tree Mentoring® Theological Framework
- Sample Sermons
- Angel Tree Mentoring Awareness Presentation with Notes.

Statement of Faith

PRISON FELLOWSHIP STATEMENT OF FAITH

We believe in one God, Creator and Lord of the Universe, the co-eternal Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We believe that Jesus Christ, God's Son, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary atoning death on the cross, rose bodily from the dead and ascended to heaven where, as truly God and truly man, He is the only mediator between God and man.

We believe that the Bible is God's authoritative and inspired Word. It is without error in all its teachings, including creation, history, its own origins, and salvation. Christians must submit to its divine authority, both individually and corporately, in all matters of belief and conduct, which is demonstrated by True righteous living.

We believe that all people are lost sinners and cannot see the Kingdom of God except through the new birth. Justification is by grace through faith in Christ alone.

We believe in one holy, universal, and apostolic Church. Its calling is to worship God and witness concerning its Head, Jesus Christ, preaching the Gospel among all nations and demonstrating its commitment by compassionate service to the needs of human beings and promoting righteousness and justice.

We believe in the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit for the individual's new birth and growth to maturity, and for the Church's constant renewal in truth, wisdom, faith, holiness, love, power, and mission.

We believe that Jesus Christ will personally and visibly return in glory to raise the dead and bring salvation and judgment to completion. God will fully manifest His kingdom when He establishes a new heaven and new earth, in which He will be glorified forever, and exclude all evil, suffering, and death.

Angel Tree Mentoring Website

The Angel Tree Mentoring website is www.angeltree.org. This website contains the latest information regarding frequently asked questions (FAQ), links to other mentoring organizations and other pertinent information related to Angel Tree Mentoring. Updates and other notifications are published on this website. The Angel Tree Mentoring website also serves as a collaboration tool for mentoring partners and the local churches.

Angel Tree Mentoring Theological Framework

A Theological Framework for Angel Tree Mentoring and the 10-F Assessment System

Overview

Angel Tree Mentoring empowers and equips church leaders and mentors to meet the needs of children who have incarcerated parents. These children need sustained friendship, encouragement, and practical support throughout the year.

The children of prisoners may be five to six times more likely than other children to become incarcerated themselves. Lowering this number can be a result of the accountability and encouragement found within caring, enduring relationships. Angel Tree Mentoring equips churches and ministry organizations with the tools for year-round involvement in the lives of these children and their families. Angel Tree Mentoring will graft families of prisoners into communities providing affection and accountability. The changed lives resulting from these relationships will have a tremendous impact on the surrounding families, communities, and society at large.

Theological Framework

The theological framework outlined in this document offers a more extensive look at the biblical roots of both Angel Tree Mentoring and the 10-F Assessment System we use. While the scriptural mandate to care for the broken, the poor, and the vulnerable is clear (Matt 25:40), what shape that care should take is more complicated. The 10-F model seeks to define 10 facets of care. The following examples underscore the scriptural foundations of Angel Tree Mentoring and for the 10-F model of care.

Biblical Mandate to Care

The glamorizing of athletic superstars and anorexic supermodels has captivated the imagination of our modern society. Constant exposure to these images from television and magazine advertisements has shaped our understanding of what we should value. This cult of image is completely contrary to the community of faith, hope, and sacrificial love established by Jesus Christ. In striking contrast, Christ builds His Kingdom on the cornerstone of serving others. The most profound impact that Jesus had on the Roman Empire was leading as a servant. He neither led a social reform movement nor ran for Roman political office. Rather, He started a community and died for our sins. The hallmark of this new community was faith operating through loving service. In Christ's words, he came not "to be served, but to serve..." (Mark 10:45). In similar fashion, the Church is called to profoundly impact society by becoming a servant to the broken and vulnerable. As the Church's identity becomes grounded in acts of service to others, it will implicitly challenge many of contemporary culture's underlying assumptions about love and social justice. One of the most compelling visions of what it means for the church to act as a servant is found in Matthew 25: 31-46:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 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 clothes 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 needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and come to visit you?" The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers 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 you, "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." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteousness to eternal life.

In being presented with the needs of Angel Tree children, the Church is confronted with the "least of these." Angel Tree Mentoring offers the Church a tangible way for its members to render eternally significant service to Christ Himself.

We are saved by faith, but the mark of authentic belief is “faith operating through love.” (Galatians 5:6) Christ pinpoints the core of the relationship between faith and action when He explains to His disciples, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock (Matt 7:24). James reinforces Christ’s words as he exhorts his readers, “faith without works is dead”(James 2:14-26).

The Church’s Response through Angel Tree Mentoring

In the remaining section of the theological framework, a wide variety of scriptural mandates for care are grouped into three categories:

- 1. Pursuing godly justice in all spheres**
- 2. Caring for the outcast**
- 3. Exhibiting faith that works through individuals and communities.**

These passages are further accompanied by explanations of how Angel Tree Mentoring can release the Church to serve Christ through scriptural service to others.

1 John 3:16-20 provides a good introduction:

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 our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with **actions and in truth**. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything.

Pursuing Godly justice in all spheres

| Reference | Scriptural mandate | The Church's response through the Angel Tree Mentoring |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Leviticus 25:35 | If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you. | This verse provides the basis for understanding the Church's responsibilities beyond its own walls. In light of this verse, God's people are challenged to provide support to Angel Tree Mentoring children and their families, who are often unable to support themselves. While poverty and prison can isolate, the goal of Angel Tree Mentoring is to integrate these children into the life of the local church and community. Angel Tree Mentoring can bring together a host of resources to address important needs for Angel Tree Mentoring children and families. |
| Job 5:15-16 | He saves the needy from the sword in their mouth; he saves them from the clutches of the powerful. So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth. | Many Angel Tree Mentoring children often live in an environment of fear and uncertainty. Angel Tree Mentoring seeks to create "safe places" where children can congregate and be exposed to the comforting touch of the Gospel. |
| Psalms 37:25-26 | I was young and now am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging for bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed. | The righteous man is praised for giving generously of his resources. As many contemplate what it means to be righteous they ask, "How can I get involved?" By instructing us to give generously, this passage tells us that we (the Christian community) are responsible for meeting the physical needs of the outcast and broken, which often includes children and families of prisoners. |
| Psalms 72:4 | He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor. | In this verse, we have a direct reference to the "children of the needy." This underscores the closeness of such children to the Father's heart. |
| Psalms 82:3 | Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. | In this psalm, we catch a glimpse of God's passion for the fatherless. Angel Tree Mentoring is a concrete way to "maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed." |
| Psalms 102:17 | He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea. | In passing a homeless person or beggar in the street, many of us have grappled with the question, "What should I do?" Angel Tree Mentoring offers the Church a specific means of responding to the critical needs of the destitute families of prisoners. By defining different roles for participation, Angel Tree Mentoring offers a tool for galvanizing untapped gifts in a church body. |

| Reference | Scriptural mandate | The Church's response through the Angel Tree Mentoring |
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| Proverbs 21:3 | To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice." | Right action is more important than religious activity. (Jeremiah 7), Angel Tree Mentoring provides a way for the Church "to love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). |
| Psalm 140:12 | I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. | When we read such passages about justice we think of legal and political reform. The justice of Christ's kingship differs from the political insurrection envisioned by the Jews during the Roman occupation. Christ's justice comes in the form of a servant bowed on his knees. In caring for the children of inmates, the Church participates in building the kingdom of God, whose heavenly justice is a model for earthly justice. The most powerful catalyst for changing systems of earthly justice is to model God's justice through a Christian community. At the heart of God's justice is the restoration of right relationships. This expands the bounds of justice beyond merely the legal sphere. We are to be intercessors for the hurting on our knees, through our works of service, and perhaps as advocates in court. |
| Proverbs 21:13 | If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered. | This verse highlights God's response to our lack of response. We are to act in response to the cries of the poor. This brings God's blessings to them and secures our hope when we find ourselves in need! |
| 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. | Here, God's mandate to care for the poor includes mercy in the legal sphere. Angel Tree Mentoring is based on the assumption that the best way to influence politics and law is to lead by example. As the Church, acting through such initiatives as Angel Tree Mentoring, offers a servant example of faith operating through love, the hearts of people in legal and political spheres may be changed, and doors for legal advocacy may be opened. |
| Proverbs 29:7 | The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern. | Often such verses invoke images of courtrooms, lawyers, and laws. We ask, "How can we get involved with justice?" God's justice throughout history involves the restoration of relationships with Himself and with others. Christ reveals a kingdom in which justice is manifest through selfless service for others (John 13; Rom. 5). This caring resulted in the transformation of families ...and an entire culture. The same radical changes can occur today. |

| Reference | Scriptural mandate | The Church's response through the Angel Tree Mentoring |
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| Isaiah 10: 1-2 | Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed on my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. | Here is a direct mandate to those involved in law and politics. This verse highlights the response for a follower of Christ who chooses to be a servant in the context of a legal or political vocation. Angel Tree Mentoring is a catalyst for uniting the faith community with other community service providers (Education, Justice, Social Services, and others) in order to give complete care to the families. Angel Tree Mentoring will exhibit a unique synergy when these organizations are drawn into cooperation. |
| Isaiah 25:4 | You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. | Angel Tree Mentoring provides safe places of refuge for families living in the midst of hardship and violence. |
| Jeremiah 22:16 | “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. | Angel Tree Mentoring is grounded in knowledge of God’s character. The more we know God, the more we will know how to answer the question, “What should we do?” In this verse, God fuses knowledge of Him with acting for the poor. There is no separation between the two. Here again, we see faith (knowledge of God) operating through love (care for the poor). |
| Ezekiel 16:49 | Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned. They did not help the poor and needy. | God’s response to Sodom’s lack of caring was fire from heaven. Sodom’s immorality was the result of selfish indulgence and uncaring attitudes. When God gives resources, He expects us to share them with those who are needy. |
| Amos 8:4-12 | Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, “When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?” – skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. | God castigates Israel not only for neglecting the needs of the poor, but also for cheating them out of the small measure they possess. Angel Tree Mentoring will serve as a catalyst to mobilize untapped resources in the Church identified by the 10-F model. Angel Tree Mentoring will provide the Church with resources for transformation. As part of a network, the faith-based community can help to counter modern-day social sins. |

Caring for the outcast

| Reference | Scriptural mandate | The Church's response through the Angel Tree Mentoring |
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| Matthew 19:21 | Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." | As God's kingdom is manifested through the Church, the reward is eternal. The only obedient response to Christ's "follow Me" is to become a servant. To say that all Christians should sell all their belongings is to misunderstand this verse. Christ was speaking to a particular situation involving a man whose biggest obstacle was that his heart was chained to his earthly possessions. Angel Tree Mentoring offers the Church an avenue to take seriously Christ's words to follow Him unconditionally. |
| 1 John 3:16-18 | 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 our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. | The hallmark of Christ's community is love. Scripture uses these tangible expressions of love as touchstones for evaluating one's sincerity of heart. Christ boldly claims that if these actions are absent, so is the "love of God." Christ further fuses faith and action by defining love not with "word or tongue, but with actions and in truth." So, true love is action for others. Angel Tree Mentoring offers local church and ministry organizations the tools to take action. Many people have the desire, but as this verse highlights, loving with word or tongue is not enough. Christ commands us to love through action. The task can appear so daunting. Churches and organizations often ask, "Where do I start?" Angel Tree Mentoring helps the Church to act. |

Faith working through people and communities

| Reference | Scriptural mandate | The Church's response through the Angel Tree Mentoring |
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| 1 Corinthians 13:3 | If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. | Here, Paul contends that actions without love are meaningless. This is why Angel Tree Mentoring is founded upon a biblical understanding of God's love as the motivation and foundation for our service. Right affections and attitudes change even tedious tasks into transforming ones. This is why Angel Tree Mentoring has taken such careful measures to understand the theological framework surrounding the Church's responsibility to care for children of inmates. Angel Tree Mentoring could reach every child of an inmate in the world, but without the under girding love of Christ, it would be for nothing. In this light, we must be careful to have not only the actions of a servant but also the proper attitudes. |
| 2 Corinthians 8:9 | For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. | Christ leads by example. In like fashion, by acting as servants, the Church becomes humble and poor according to the world's values so that those whom it serves will become rich with the gift of eternal life. |
| Galatians 2:10 (Also see Acts 11-15; 2 Corinthians 8,9) | All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. | God used the poverty of the Judean Church to unite these Jewish believers with their new brothers and sisters who were scattered over the Empire. These former "outsiders" gave generously as a sign of gratitude for God's grace in Christ. Understanding that practical concern for the poor can be a unifying factor among churches, Angel Tree Mentoring provides an effective channel for the resources of grace to be given to those in need. Everyone –giver and recipient – is changed for the better! |

| Reference | Scriptural mandate | The Church's response through the Angel Tree Mentoring |
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| James 2:2-9 | <p>Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also come in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ... If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.</p> | <p>James confirms God's passion for the poor and the needy. James links Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself with acting justly towards the poor. As the Church accents the imprint of God's image on humanity, the poor will not only receive care but also respect. This changes the mindset of all involved. Condescension gives way to mutual commitment; dependency is transformed into discipleship. (Onesimus, the runaway slave of Philemon, became the Bishop of Ephesus before the close of the first century!)</p> |

The 10-F Model of Care

Once the biblical mandate to care has been highlighted as a responsibility of the Church, the question of *how* to define care arises. The 10-F model of care seeks to create a biblically based, comprehensive guide for the local church and ministry organizations to care for Angel Tree Mentoring children. Each F represents a different facet of caring for an Angel Tree Mentoring child. The 10-F model also offers a blueprint for how the network of supporting people and groups will be organized. The 10-F Needs Assessment system and the 10-F profile forms, derived from this model, provide a needs-assessment tool for churches and ministry organizations as they come alongside at-risk children. This result of the 10-F assessment process will determine the shape of the individualized program of care for each child.

Biblical Perspectives on the 10-F's

The following table provides descriptive background on the “10-Fs.”

| F | Perspective |
|-------------------|---|
| Faith | <p>Faith “operates through love” (Gal. 5:6) and requires a community of diversely gifted people to give it full expression. The different roles of Angel Tree Mentoring - pastor, leader, mentor, and volunteer - are designed to help many believers put their faith into action. Individual trust in Christ is the essential condition of personal salvation (Rom. 3:21-31); however, living faith thrives only in a context of loving friendship and service. When Paul tells the Philippians to “work out their salvation...for God is at work in you” (Phil. 2:12 ff.) he has the whole community in mind. First Corinthians 12-14 further illuminates the community context for everyone’s gifts and talents.</p> |
| Fellowship | <p>Fellowship is rooted in the very nature of the Triune God. The unity in diversity of the Trinity gives expression to the desire of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to share the eternal joy of being with creation (Rev. 4:11). Demonstrating a desire for fellowship, Jesus looked in anticipation for the triumphal return to the presence of His Father and sharing this joy with his friends (John 17:1-6, 20-26). The apostle Paul rejoiced in the completeness of God’s plan wherein the purpose of the Father, the provision of the Son, and the presence of the Holy Spirit would secure a people forever (Eph. 1:3-14).</p> <p>The unity of the Godhead is the model for Christian fellowship (<i>koinonia</i>). All believers have been baptized into Christ and enjoy the new life through the presence of the Spirit (1 Corinthians. 12; 13; Eph. 4:1-6; 2 Peter 1:1-4). The Gospel eliminates all barriers to fellowship and enhances all types of relationships; however, lasting integrity and intimacy can be sustained only through a focus on the One who is greater than all the parties in fellowship. Christ is the origin and purpose of all – He is also the sustainer of any situation (Col.1: 1-15).</p> |

| F | Perspective |
|-----------------------|---|
| Family | <p>Family can be either a profound reflection of Triune Life (Eph. 5) or a deep manifestation of human rebellion (Gen. 4). The story of Cain and Abel reminds us that the possibility of brother hating brother has always been with us. In contrast, the Gospel creates redemptive possibilities for present family relationships (1 Corinthians. 7; Eph. 5:22-6:9) and places outcasts in new and healthy environments (Eph 2:11-21). Only Christ can make former enemies friends (Acts 8-15) and completely rearrange social relationships (Galatians 3:28-29, Philemon). Scripture is emphatic concerning God’s gracious placement of the hurting into healthy families.</p> |
| Fresh Thinking | <p>Fresh Thinking originates with the Lord, who is the source of all wisdom (Prov. 1, 8; Col. 2:6-10) and is the Master Potter who fashions all things and inspires human creativity. Created in the image of God, all humans have the potential to think God’s thoughts after Him and create unique products and relations. There are three facets that allow God’s wisdom to be refracted in positive ways: humility, hope, and holiness.</p> <p>Humility is more than openness or tolerance. These substitutes can be refuges for intellectual and moral laziness. Humility involves the genuine recognition of our limited understanding in comparison with God’s limitless wisdom. Rather than stifling new ideas, humility actually creates greater flexibility and resourcefulness by viewing new situations as opportunities rather than obstacles.</p> <p>The second facet is hope. Christian hope shapes our entire ethical life (Rom 13:9f; I John 3:1-3). Hope also creates expectations that solutions for particular challenges can be found (Phil. 1:7-10).</p> <p>The third disposition, arising from the first two, is holiness. Holiness in this context invites the consecration of our affections, attitude, and intellect for Kingdom service.</p> |
| Friendships | <p>Friendships are relationships in which two or more people “look in the same direction” (C.S. Lewis). Brotherly love, the healthy affection of peers, is rooted in Jesus’ example to His disciples. Self-donation founded upon the grace of God will attract lasting, loving, and loyal relationships (Phil. 2:1-11). Agape love is the root, and genuine comradeship is the fruit of spiritual vitality. Even our Lord calls His disciples’ friends while asking them to sacrificially care for one another (John 13, 15).</p> <p>The Church needs to provide creative contexts in which friendships can flourish naturally. Activities for peers and whole families give an opportunity for common gifts and interests to be discovered. These should not be confined to formal or institutional settings. The homes of maturing believers are a great locale for modeling kindness.</p> |

| F | Perspective |
|------------------------------|---|
| Feelings about self | <p>Feelings about self arise from a proper view of our origins and our destiny. We can know what to do only if we understand the story of which we are a part. Jesus knew that He had come from the Father and would return to the Father. This awareness of the Father’s favor released His acts of service and provided the inner contentment necessary to endure the Cross (John 13:1ff). Healthy self-esteem integrates unconditional love and uncompromising values. Children and families suffering from abuse, broken relationships, and economic privation do not need indulgence or legalism. Affection and accountability create a healthy self-respect. These arise when one or more mature adults take time to serve the child and family in need. Angel Tree Mentoring helps foster these redemptive relationships.</p> |
| Finances | <p>Finances are graciously provided by the Lord through the mediated means of 1) legitimate labor (2 Thessalonians 3) and/or 2) the generosity of the community to provide for those unable to provide for themselves (Acts 11 cf. 2 Corinthians 8-9). The important principle here is that work is good, noble and purposeful. Humans were designed for meaningful labor prior to the Fall (Gen. 1). Finding family-sustaining employment is a great challenge especially for single-parent households.</p> <p>At-risk children and their families may suffer from both inadequate finances to meet the necessities of life and practical knowledge about how to manage finances, work, employment, etc. The sensitive listening of an Angel Tree Mentor may lead to imparting some of this knowledge and experience or guiding a child to resources that will better prepare him/her for work and wealth.</p> |
| Fitness | <p>Legitimate concern for physical vitality arises from the truth of the Incarnation of our Lord and the fact that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 6). Both adults and children need to be lured away from the passivity of a computer, television, and video entertainment to a world of healthy exercise through individual and team activities. Children are especially at risk if they are not inculcated with good habits early in life.</p> |
| Fulfillment at school | <p>Fulfillment at school is the privilege of every disciple of Christ. The Hebrew wisdom tradition (See Psalm 119, Proverbs. 1-9, and Eccl. 11-12) gives the most complete teaching about disciplined learning for a lifetime. Schooling options will vary from location to location, but if a child receives support from his or her family and has at least one positive adult mentor, test scores increase in high-risk schools when adult mentors are involved. Excellence in the academic sphere is directly connected with enthusiasm for learning. As knowledge of Scripture grows, the importance of all arenas of knowledge will be magnified.</p> |

| F | Perspective |
|------------|---|
| Fun | The clearest mandate for fun is located in God’s own divine command for his creation to take a day of rest. Fun recreational activities find their source in God’s own pleasure regarding His creation and His rationale for the Sabbath (Gen. 1-2; Ex. 20). Fun is not the opposite of faith or spiritual vitality. Fun is a key ingredient in a holistic view of God and God’s world. God’s people have always been a celebratory community (Nehemiah. 8). The many festivals of the Jewish tradition and the liturgical “holy days” of the church all testify to God’s joy. Recreation, especially activities such as Angel Tree Camping, that give urban children a chance to experience rural and wilderness settings, have proven to be instrumental in shaping character and relationships. The Puritans used to say that “God loves adverbs” suggesting that it is not what you do but how you do it. |

Angel Tree Mentoring Sample Sermons

Communication Helps for Busy Leaders

The following materials are designed to stimulate thinking and assist congregational leaders with communicating the biblical mandate for the Angel Tree Mentoring Ministry.

- These works are brief, flexible, and are intended to be a *starting point* for the leader's own unique presentation(s).
- They are adaptable for classroom, pulpit and any small-group setting.
- Additional samples and materials are available at the Angel Tree Mentoring website: www.angeltree.org.
- In this era of information overload, clarity and conciseness are very important. These messages are not a substitute for personal research and "wrestling" with the biblical text. We hope they will inspire personal and congregational reflection and application in ways that are fresh and exciting.
- This section contains one Maximum Impact Message derived from Matthew 25 and 10 message outlines from the Old and New Testaments.
- All of the shorter outlines are organized along simple interpretive lines: The *Context* of the particular passage is given, followed by the *Content*, with the *Consequences* for contemporary application coming at the conclusion. References to Angel Tree Mentoring are referred to in every message.
- A brief bibliography is enclosed for further reference and study.
- All of these materials assume a basic commitment to the inspiration and reliability of Scripture and an adherence to historic Christianity as affirmed by the Nicene Creed.
- All of these texts issue a clarion call for justice and loving service. The dispensation, literary genre, author, or audience may change, but the message is unmistakable and our responsibility is inescapable!

Sample Sermon 1: "Loving the Least of These"

Text: Matthew 25: 31-46

(Maximum Impact Message)

1. Context and Introduction:

All the Gospels describe Jesus reaching out to all types of people: the lofty and the lowly; the idealistic and irreverent; the religious and the rejected. Our Lord had special compassion for life's losers: the last, the least, the little and the lost. In spoken parables and sensitive practices, Christ cared for the broken, the hurting, and the vulnerable. There is one particular group who fit all of these needy categories and deserves our particular attention today. This group is the *last* one we think of, one of the *least* regarded by our culture, has *little* significance in the public eye, and is *lost* in our busy shuffle of our society. Who are these? The children and families of prisoners. These hurting little ones are:

- five to six times more likely than other children to become future prisoners, according to some reports.
- mostly fatherless (some are motherless or without either parent).
- three times more likely to commit suicide than their peers.
- 40 times more likely to suffer abuse.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day had little regard for the lowly. They had *theological* excuses: "It must be God's will." They had *moral* excuses: "It must be their fault." Even *sociological* thinking infected their attitudes: "Well, some have to win...and some have to lose."

We rationalize in similar ways today. We condemn welfare recipients as lazy; we build more prisons for future offenders and more shelters for the homeless; we put security gates around our communities to keep undesirables at bay...

2. Content:

Jesus calls us to love Him by loving the "least of these"

Our text will not allow us to dismiss the needy quite so easily! Jesus declares that our eternal destiny rests upon a faith that demonstrates love to those who cannot return the favor. This service is not very "religious" and is utterly without pride and self-consciousness. Those who are rewarded with eternal joy are almost surprised by the Master's commendation. They loved Jesus by loving the needy and doing this as a normal part of their daily life.

Jesus comes to us every day in “distressing disguises” (Mother Teresa). Our passage says we can see Christ in

- The hungry and thirsty
- The lonely
- The naked
- The sick
- AND the imprisoned (It does not say why the person was in prison!)

There were two groups judged by Jesus: those who selflessly served the needy as a regular part of life and those who did not serve the needy and therefore failed to serve Christ!

Personal faith in Christ’s death and resurrection is the essential starting point for our salvation; however, this faith must operate through love in our attitudes (1 Corinthians 13) and actions (James 2:1-26).

Our problem is finding ways to serve in the midst of a hectic schedule and so many competing demands for our attention:

- We care...but we are too busy.
- We care...but we feel inadequate.
- We care...but we are afraid.

How do we offer help when we are barely holding on ourselves? How do we serve people we do not know? We cannot say, “It’s not my ministry.” Jesus did not distinguish between clergy and laity, social workers and business folk in this passage. We cannot just write a check. Checks are a good start, but our text demands touch; Jesus’ words mean personal involvement. So, where do we start?

3. Consequences: Applying the words of Christ today as we meet the needs of children and families impacted by imprisonment.

Earlier we referred to one group of “the least of these”: children and families of prisoners. Our hearts and minds ought to be stirred to action. How can we practically respond? There are three steps we can take [Angel Tree Mentoring needs to be mentioned as the practical vehicle] to obey our Lord’s command and receive His lasting commendation –

- We must *look out* and allow ourselves to become informed and insightful regarding the children and families of prisoners who live in our neighborhood, in our parish, in our church’s sphere of ministry. [Angel Tree Mentoring has open doors for researchers]
- We must *look in* to our personal and congregational lives and be willing to embrace new priorities for the poor and new relationships among the marginal. [Angel Tree Mentoring can make this practical with simple ways to serve one to two hours per week]

- We must *look forward* to the joy of having many new friends with us on the day we see Christ face to face. We were the joy set before Jesus as He endured the sufferings of the Cross (Hebrews 12); our joy forever will be fellowship with those we served! [Angel Tree Mentoring is a servant to the local church, releasing her members to do what they have *already* committed to doing!]

Will we look out and see the opportunities? Will we look in and discover an expansion of heart and home for these children? Will we look forward and eagerly await our Lord's "Well done"? Our eternity and today's society rest upon our response.

Sample Sermon 2: “Ministry to the Marginal”

Text: Deuteronomy 24:17-22

1. Context and Introduction

As the Israelites prepare to settle in Canaan, a new generation is given instruction concerning faithfulness to the Lord God and each other. Throughout this Book of the Covenant, the people are reminded to remember God’s grace in their deliverance from Egypt and renew their dedication to worship only the Lord God and be witnesses of His mercy through their exemplary moral lives (Deuteronomy 1-11).

In the midst of civil, marital, and military details, the people of God are commanded to give special consideration to the needy and vulnerable among them.

Though Christians enjoy the blessings of the New Covenant and are not bound by all the ceremonial strictures of the Old Testament Law, the call to care for the poor remains – indeed, Jesus reinforces this call in His words and works (Luke 6). Let’s look at the people in need...

2. Content and command: Caring for the needy

Notice the vulnerable singled out for special care:

- Aliens who need acceptance
- The fatherless who need support
- The widowed who are hungry and lonely

Each of these groups deserves our compassion and care. But there is one group that fits all of these categories: the children and families of prisoners. They are

- Alienated from society through shame and neglect
- Often fatherless (and/or motherless) and need mentors and adult support
- “Widowed” for a short or long time and in need of friendship

The Israelites were commanded to leave provision in the fields for these needy ones as well as to remember their wants in other ways. How are we caring for those in crisis?

3. Consequences: Caring today

We must first remember that we are only a few paychecks or a single event away from being one in need! We need to remember God's goodness to us is the starting point of our service to others. We can serve all the needy – and especially the children of prisoners by

- Desiring to set aside time and resources for them [Angel Tree Mentoring can help with effective channels]
- Doing simple acts of service [Angel Tree Mentoring has a place for everyone]
- Deciding that service to those who cannot return the favor is a normal way of living for the Christian (John 13).

Will we be a people of the New Covenant?

Sample Sermon 3: "Piety is Practical" Text: Psalms 15 & 24

1. Context and Introduction

These two psalms open a wonderful window into understanding the character God commends. All believers should take note of the attitudes and actions that bring pleasure to God. They were written as exhortations and preparations for personal and congregational worship.

Are we worshipping God with our lives as well as our lips? Are we righteous in our deeds as well as religious in our dispositions?

2. Content and challenges from Psalms 15 & 24

Notice what we are not to do if our piety is going to be pure:

- No slander (including cynical remarks and implicit put-downs)
- No wrongdoing (in motive or method)
- No acceptance of bribes (questionable gifts, junkets, or "requests")

How many of us can still stand before the Lord? We are not done...look at what we are to do:

- Walk in integrity (Psalm 26), doing what is right
- Speak the truth from the heart (this is not spewing out unedited feelings!)
- Honor those who fear the Lord
- Keep our (even painful) commitments
- Freely give our resources

Psalm 24 puts it simply – we are to have “clean hands and a pure heart.”

The promises for the faithful are marvelous:

- Security
- Divine blessing
- Divine vindication

How do we apply these words today? They are very clear and admit to no fuzziness in interpretation. Our piety is to be practical; our religious affections must lead to right actions; our devotion must be proven by deeds.

3. Consequences: Practical piety

Will we be men and women with pure motives and methods, seeking the good of others more than our own?

Will we keep our commitments, even when it is hard? One of our key commitments is to love the broken, the poor, and the vulnerable!

Will we look for ways to serve God by serving others, giving sacrificially of our money and time?

If we desire the commendation of Christ, we will hear the psalmist's words afresh [Angel Tree Mentoring makes our service practical.]

Sample Sermon 4: “Advocates for the Afflicted”

Text: Psalm 72 (see also Psalms 82 & 140)

1. Context and Introduction

In Solomon’s day and ours, many people long for leaders with integrity who execute their duties fairly. Anyone in a position of influence or oversight should listen carefully to these poetic and practical words of wisdom. Though they are directed to the King, they are applicable for all longing to extend God’s kingdom through the love of Jesus Christ.

One of the great needs in our day is for God’s people to become advocates for the afflicted, defenders of those who cannot defend themselves. It seems as if our institutions – even in a democratic society – often favor the rich and powerful. This psalm makes it clear that serving God means caring for the needy and vulnerable.

One of the most vulnerable groups in our day consists of the children and families of prisoners. They are often ignored or shunned, and they do not get the public attention of other (equally needy) groups.

2. Content: Justice for all

In verse 1 the writer prays, “Endow the King with Justice, O God...” What does this mean? What is just leadership? In the verses that follow, we see that:

- It is *fair* leadership, with a particular concern for the poor who often get the legal and personal short end of any situation.
- It is *faithful* leadership, actively serving the needs of children and families in crisis.
- It is *forward-looking* leadership, rescuing and redeeming the helpless because they are precious.

3. Consequences: Our servant–leadership today

Our focus today is serving the needs of children and families devastated by the incarceration of a loved one. As Christians, we are called to lead as salt and light (Matthew 5). As believers committed to the needy (I John 3), we can fulfill this call by:

- *Submitting* to the Lord and allowing our hearts to be filled with compassion
- *Serving* the children and others in need by becoming their advocate personally and, if needed, helping them deal with legal obstacles to justice [The Angel Tree Mentoring network will help]
- *Stimulating* others to get involved. If only a few persons in every congregation help out, there will no longer be any neglected families crying for help. They and we will be transformed!

Sample Sermon 5: "Hearing the Helpless"

Text: Psalm 102 (especially verses 17, 20)

1. Context and Introduction

This is a prayer arising from great suffering; a petition of pain which all of us can identify with at times. It is a marvelous privilege to pour out our soul to a compassionate God who hears our prayers and personally intervenes to answer them in unexpected ways.

Notice the movement toward increased trust:

- Verses 1-11 speak of *desperation* in suffering.
- Verses 12-22 speak of the Lord's *deliverance* and our security in his promises.
- Verses 23-28 remind us of God's *sovereignty* over all the earth and all our affairs.

Our focus is on verses 17 and 20 where our petitioner proclaims God's responsive grace.

2. Content: God hears the helpless

God hears the helpless and delights in responding to the call of the destitute. He also has a particular concern for the petitions of prisoners who groan in daily misery. There is another cry embraced by our psalm. **It is the cry of a child left hurting by an imprisoned parent. God hears the sighs and tears from these lonely ones and He will answer their pleas.**

He answers through loving servants from local churches who are ready to be as Christ to their neighbors in need! The children and families affected by imprisoned loved ones are often left destitute financially and psychologically. God will intervene through the practical help of real people.

3. Consequences: Will we respond?

Do we hear the cries of the helpless? Do we hear the Lord's holy word of advocacy for the "least of these"?

Do we hasten to get involved? Are we proactive or reactive in our practices?

Angel Tree Mentoring offers a variety of ways for God's people to practice love.

Sample Sermon 6: “A Reward for Righteousness”

Text: Proverbs 21:13; 29:7

1. Context and Introduction

Proverbial wisdom helps us get a practical handle on everyday life. The authors of this collection looked at morality and spirituality in very concrete and relational terms. Ecstatic experiences and esoteric ideals were less important than humble attitudes and holy actions.

Loving God was understood in terms of the “*fear* of the Lord” (a reverence for his sovereignty) and *faithfulness* to the moral demand of the Covenant. These memorable sayings were taught in the court of the King and among the clans of the village. The goal was practical piety and personal relationships marked by integrity.

One of the ways the people of God were to demonstrate their love was in serving the needs of the poor. These texts give a provocative message...

2. Content of Proverbs 21:13 and 29:7

A. These verses we are studying are just a sampling of the teaching concerning the poor. The first is direct and may even be offensive to our modern ears. If we are not concerned with the cries of the poor, our own prayers will not be answered!

In this era of information overload, we can unconsciously refuse to hear the cries of the needy – because there are so many appeals! We are often overwhelmed by our own needs and find little within our hearts for others. At the same time, we call out to God to answer our many prayers!

There is one prayer that will always catch God’s attention and evoke His affection. When we pray for the broken – and offer ourselves as an answer to our prayer – the Lord will hear and intervene.

B. Proverbs 29:7 declares that we must be active advocates for the hurting. Are we:

- Caring for the single parent waiting for late child support?
- Committed to the homeless who want help?
- Concerned for the children and families of prisoners?

Justice is more than legalistic fairness: We must desire that the poor find a home with God and in our community as equal members of our family of faith and our society! How we serve the poor can vary. Whether we serve is not an option!

3. Consequences for our culture

We see that our own prayers are affected by our concern for the poor and that this concern must be translated into action.

Angel Tree Mentoring provides a realistic way to respond to one of the most needy groups – the children and families of prisoners.

Will we STOP ignoring the cries, STAND UP for the poor, and STAY committed until all have the opportunity for life and love among us?

Sample Sermon 7: "Whose Side Are We On?"

Text: Isaiah 10:1-2; 25:4

1. Context and Introduction

Isaiah of Jerusalem is delivering his oracles of judgment and hope in the midst of political and social upheaval. Assyrian armies threaten the existence of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (see Amos and Hosea for more on this crisis). Only divine intervention will prevent little Judah from destruction (Isaiah 36-39).

In the midst of these trying circumstances, our prophet issues his sternest warnings to the religiously devout of the land, warning them of judgment if they do not repent. What do they need to repent of? Idolatry is first. The Lord God will tolerate no rivals for worship (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 25). Immorality is next. Pagan devotion led to awful sexual and social degradations. The third area is one often missed by Isaiah's hearers...and by us: Injustice toward the poor.

Our culture is steeped in similar self-deception. Our *idols* are less obvious but no less compelling. Our *immoral* behavior is celebrated by various media dedicated to narcissism. *Injustice* is evident as the rich find "justice" in court while the poor are represented by overworked public defenders. We are lulled to sleep by the pseudo-prosperity of an inflated stock market and the proliferation of entertainment options that distract us from our calling as believers.

2. Content: Are we under God's "Woe!" or enthralled in by His "Wonder"?

A. The prophet's message of woe is clear. In our terms, we need to wake up and recognize God's animosity toward lawmakers in the pay of lobbyists and politicians who love power and

- Deprive the poor of their rights
- Deprive widows and orphans of basic needs.

James 1 declares that real faith practices love through personal holiness and a concomitant concern for widows and orphans.

One group of poor off the "radar screens" of most is the children and families of prisoners. Who is their advocate? Are we caring for the "least of these" in a personal way?

B. "Woe!" is not the final word. We are also to wonder at the marvelous grace of God who is a refuge for the poor and needy in distress and a shelter and shade from the storms and blazing heat of suffering.

Our gracious God promises such relief, and provides such care through the community of faith!

3. Consequences and application

Are we a shade and shelter, a refuge for those who have been tossed about by life? The children and families of prisoners did not choose their fate. They need tangible help from communities of faith willing to have their affections changed and schedules adjusted.

Jeremiah 22:16 says that to know God is to work for the poor! Instead of neglect we offer nurture; instead of oppression we give new opportunities. Will we respond?

Angel Tree Mentoring provides a way to live this message...

Sample Sermon 8: "God Loves the Poor"

Text: Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20

1. Context: The Kingdom of God is freshly present in the words and works of Jesus.

All of the Gospels record the words and works of our Lord for communities wrestling with a changing world. Matthew presents Jesus as "Emmanuel," the "With-Us-God" (Matthew 1:21-22; 28:20). Mark unveils a sovereign servant willingly giving Himself for the undeserving (Mark 10:45). Luke tells us that Jesus is the Savior of the world, with a love for "losers" (Luke 7, 19). John proclaims that Jesus is the Word made fully human who makes truth tangible (John 1:1-18).

Matthew begins his formal presentation of Jesus' teachings with a "Mountain Manifesto" (Chapters 5-7). This sermon begins with the foundational principle for entry into the kingdom: the Beatitudes. These are the basic dispositions of a disciple, not the advanced character of a seasoned saint.

Luke's prophetic "Sermon on the Plain" records Jesus' affection for the humble and poor and denunciation of the haughty and prosperous. A reversal is coming and the moment is at hand.

2. Content: God loves the poor!

Matthew's "poor in spirit" speaks to those who recognize their spiritual destitution and personal dependence upon God. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the humble! Luke describes Jesus' unique affection for the poor and neglected in society. They have no hope in this world, save God's intervention through persons called and committed to their good.

God's kingdom is both present and future. One day there will be no pain or tears, no hungry mouths or loudmouth despots. All who trust the Lord will enjoy bliss while the unrepentant are buffeted by judgment. Our task as God's people is to live the future today - to begin to demonstrate the righteousness, peace, and joy, that characterize the tangible presence of God (Romans 14:17).

How do we live as ones "poor in spirit"? How do we love the poor who are loved by God?

3. Consequences: Loving the poor today

In our prosperous society we are rewarded for pride (ambition) and compensated for serving others' greed (the bottom line). Matthew's record is clear: We must recognize our total dependence upon God and live humbly.

Luke admonishes us to be proactive for the poor because God is on their side. Having humbled ourselves, will we actively help the needy?

Angel Tree Mentoring is one way to put action to our transformed attitudes. Through our local church and in cooperation with others, we can make a difference in the lives of those despised by the powerful and ignored by the political powers.

Will we hear the words of our Lord afresh? Will we demonstrate our discipleship in deed? The decision is ours, and the rewards of obedience are no less than the fullness of God's kingdom.

Sample Sermon 9: "The Original 'Freedom Ride'"

Text: The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts

(This message is simply a series of texts in Luke that have the poor and rejected as their focus. A comment and suggestion for preaching and teaching will follow each text.)

1. Introduction: The Paradox of Grace

Luke's Gospel confronts the hearer/reader with a Jesus who is "not a tame lion" (C. S. Lewis). At every turn Jesus is doing the unexpected. His love for life's "losers" was particularly galling to the political and religious elite.

The Gospel is full of paradox, full of contradictions to the pretentious philosophies of yesteryear and today! Life comes through death, winning through losing, leadership through serving, the greatest are the least.

The Book of Acts details the expansion of an "incendiary fellowship" that was learning to live and love in radically new ways.

As we walk through Luke and Acts, our priorities will be challenged and our values shaken. Perhaps our "freedom ride" will change our associations and friendships. Do we love only the lovely? Do we serve only those who can return the favor?

2. Content: Words and works of grace

7:36-50: The despised woman was crowned with dignity

8:26-39: Jesus delights in restoring the rejected

9:46-50: The least in this world is the greatest in the kingdom

9:57-62: We cannot place conditions on our discipleship

10:25-37: Our "neighbor" is anyone in need – even our ethnic/social "enemy"

12:13-21: Only investments in God's work bring lasting rewards

12:22-48: Where is our trust/ How are we using our time and resources?

14:1-14: Whom do we invite to our parties?

16:19-31: Do we respond – today – to the cries of the poor? Our hereafter depends upon it!

18:18-29: It is hard for the self-satisfied to enter the kingdom!

19:1-9: Will we respond to Christ with repentance and restitution? St Ambrose once said, "The poor deserve to have returned to them what is already theirs." Are we prosperous at the expense of others?

3. Consequences: Applying these words: The early Church shows us how...

Acts 2-6: Are we sharing our homes, sacrificially giving within our fellowship(s)?

Acts 11-15: Are we sharing our faith and goods with “outsiders” who cannot return the favor (2 Corinthians 8-9)?

Angel Tree Mentoring opens to door for evangelism through loving service to those forgotten by society. Will we once again demonstrate the radical difference between worldly selfishness and Christian sacrifice? Scores of children in our neighborhoods await our response.

Sample Sermon 10: "Faith Will Work"

Text: The Book of James

1. Context and Introduction

James wrote this powerful, proverbial work in response to the growing intellectualism and attendant moral and social apathy in local churches that misunderstood the message of grace and turned liberty into license and faith into personal assent.

This book is full of prophetic proverbs that leave little for imaginative interpretation. Our challenge is not so much understanding but obedience to God's commands. James reveals God's love for the poor and vulnerable and God's anger at the rich who do nothing for them. We need to hear this call anew and recognize the broken among us. Children and families of prisoners are particularly exposed and need our care. Angel Tree Mentoring offers believers opportunities to let their "faith operate through love"(Galatians 5:6).

2. Content and Challenges

1:9-11: God's perspective really matters! Better to be rejected by the world and received by God!

1:22-29: Religion always means relationship with the lowly. Who are we caring for?

2:1-12: Who do we honor in our congregations? The big givers? The powerful?

2:14-26: Faith will work. Obedience is the proof of our devotion.

4:13-16: Business plans are good, but do we depend upon God's goodness?

5:1-6: How do we care for those who depend upon us? If we own property, do we serve our renters? If we are employers, are our employees glad to work for us? Do business colleagues and competitors trust our integrity?

3. Consequences and Application

Serving the broken is both easy and hard. It is easy because the work is simple. It is hard because we are selfish, busy, and distracted. Will we respond to these exhortations or forget what we have heard?

Angel Tree Mentoring opens many avenues for our obedience. Whatever our schedules, whatever our gifts, there is a place for us in God's plan for caring for the poor.

