

# Overcoming a Poverty Mindset in the Church

*A personal journey* - by John Richardson | January 16, 2014

Have you ever heard...(or said) *I work so hard, but still can't make ends meet... If the economy would turn around, I might have a chance... You don't understand what it is like to struggle - it's the story of my life... If I ever have any extra, I'll be the first to give back and live generously...*

You nailed it...that's the poverty mindset. And it can be both heartbreaking and frustrating to deal with this mindset as you call people to imitate the generous ways of God. So, what do you do?

For starters, you can search Google. There are a ton of articles related to the poverty mindset online. Some of these resources are developed by churches and ministers...others by sociologists and well-intentioned bloggers. But, let me save you some time. They pretty much all say the same thing. The majority of these resources encourage you to nudge people from an "I can't" mindset to an "I can" attitude. Sounds good right?

There's only one problem. Momentary motivation rarely leads to long term change.

Other ministry blogs will tell you that the poverty mindset is destructive and they point to a variety of cut and paste verses from Proverbs. They tell you to work hard, be more disciplined and stop making foolish decisions.

Granted, that's all good advice and I would never counsel you to take Proverbs lightly.

But, here's the problem. All of these answers address the surface and the temporal. They don't get to the root of the issue. Each of these suggestions buys into the idea that we are defined by what we have and by what we do...not by who we are.

**Identifying the real issue** - I have never been in a church that is completely absent of the poverty mindset. It's almost ridiculous to see this in the U.S., but there are pockets of it in every group of people that gather for worship. Additionally, there are some church communities that run their organization out of a poverty mindset. They are always worried about meeting the budget. They are uptight about last week's giving. They don't know how they will get through another strenuous financial year.

So, what do we tell those disciples who think this way? What do we say to churches which operate in this manner? Work harder? Be more disciplined? Plead more often?

While those answers may be contextually appropriate, they don't address the real issue. Here's the big question: *Who are you?*

Are you defined by what you have, what you've done...or by who you are? At its core, the poverty mindset is an identity issue. And it makes perfect sense that both people and entire church communities would define themselves by the resources in their possession. Isn't that what the rest of society does? Isn't that the way of the world? Doesn't that fit with the business models and consumer mindsets of our day?

**But, listen to the resounding theme of Scripture...**

- The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1)
- Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)
- For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3)

According to the Bible, our identity is not found in what we possess, it is found in who possesses us. Our lives are hidden in Him and the actions that we take are actions of faith. We are not identified by our meager possessions, we are identified by our Father—who created, sustains and rules over all things.

Isn't that the way that Jesus lived? Even Jesus said, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:30). He – our perfect example – said that the only way to find your identity is to lose yourself in the lordship and leadership of the Father. And no child of the King is poor.

Jesus "had no place to lay his head," but we would be hard pressed to call Him lacking. He "had no place to lay his head," but in spite of that, He called us to join Him in His abundance (John 10:10). That's because living on a peasant's income in ancient Israel didn't make Him poor. He was rich in every way as He lived by faith and trusted in the astounding wealth of His Father.

He didn't have a poverty mindset because His identity was not wrapped up in His (on-hand) possessions.

**A story for perspective** - A few years ago, a friend made a last minute request that I go to Orlando and attend a conference he was hosting. I almost laughed at the proposal. There was no way. Living paycheck-to-paycheck didn't provide room for a last minute flight, hotel room, rental car, conference fee and meals. But days later, I clearly sensed God telling me to go. So, I crawled out of bed and got on the internet. I had a small reserve remaining in my bank account and knew that if I used it, our family could potentially run into deep financial trouble. This was not wise money management.

Through a remarkable series of online events, I was able to book a last minute flight at a deep discount and package it with a hotel rate that was more than fifty percent off. All told, the trip would cost me about \$300. So, I booked it.

On the last day of the conference, I got a surprise. No one in Orlando knew my financial situation. No one knew what the trip would cost me. But as we sang in worship, a gentleman came up and tapped me on the shoulder. He told me that someone had been prompted by God to give me a gift. He wouldn't tell me who the gift was from, other than to say it was not from either him or my friend that was hosting the conference.

Humbled, I said thank you and slipped the envelope into my pocket.

As the conference closed, I made my way to the rental car and headed for the airport. When I opened the envelope, there was a wad of \$20 bills. In total, the gift was \$300...covering the cost of the entire trip and replacing the meager reserve funds that were left for our family.

That event did not happen because I changed my attitude or mental state. It did not happen because I tightened up my boots and worked a little harder (I was already working about 60 hours a week at the time). It happened because I decided to listen to my Father and trust in my identity as His child.

One note of clarification: Faith is not easy (that's why it's called faith). I still have moments where I define myself by the resources in my possession. But, in my healthy moments, I know that my identity is hidden in Christ...not in stuff.

**And realizing that identity shift is the key** to helping your church members...or your church community... overcome the poverty mindset. *How will this work for you ?*

<http://www.generouschurch.com/>

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**GenerousChurch.com** surveyed the giving habits and mindsets of over 12,000 church members. We made some fascinating discoveries. Almost 80% of church members classify their giving as either **disciplined** or **cautious**. Here are examples of people who have been unleashed from this mindset.

[www.generouschurch.com/give-like-grandma/](http://www.generouschurch.com/give-like-grandma/) - "Generous Giving AND Disciplined Spending"

[justgivemore.tumblr.com/](http://justgivemore.tumblr.com/) = personal blog - "One Month of Generous Giving"

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyXJeus-wm4&feature=share](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyXJeus-wm4&feature=share) - Great Video of "non-cautious" Giving