

Chris' Vision:

James 1:27 presents language about poverty that has become famous: "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you." (James 1:27 NLT) Touching poverty is clearly at the heart of our worldview. But as famous as this verse is, our translations don't capture all of James' intended meaning. The words translated 'caring for orphans' actually mean 'to check in on them yourself' or 'to make sure that they're okay by seeing for yourself.' In other words: it's deeply personal.

This is something which can be incredibly significant for us because it gives us the opportunity to think about compassion and poverty differently. Compassion can be an obligation we pursue with a sense of duty, and we often experience it in that way. A lot of very important activity takes place because people respond to a sense of duty. But there's more, and this verse from James hints at it. Compassion can also be the 'difference we can't help but make' because we are drawn into the power of someone else's story. In other words touching poverty can be a 'should do' or a 'get to do'. In both cases the behaviour may be exactly the same, but 'the place it comes from' inside ourselves is very different -- and so is the effect it has on us as well as our ability to maintain it. What a revolution.

It means compassion can become an adventure in generosity we can't imagine our lives without. Imagine if we could capture this as a community. Imagine that we were not only active in the face of poverty, but we find the ways in which serving others becomes such a dynamic and natural part of our own lives that we can't imagine not doing it. This is the opportunity that is in front of us. We can be known in our city for the action we take as well as the place that it comes from in us.