

Week of January 29, 2012

Giving in a Greedy Culture

Passage Outline

1. Share Generously (Deuteronomy 15:7-11)
2. Treat with Dignity (Deuteronomy 24:10-15)
3. Protect with Mercy (Deuteronomy 24:17-18)

What Is This Study About?

We have an obligation to meet the needs of people our culture would prefer to ignore.

How Can This Study Impact Your Life?

Our study will help you get more personally involved in helping people in need around you.

1. Share Generously - Deuteronomy 15:7-11

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

⁷ If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. ⁸ Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. ⁹ Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. ¹⁰ Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. ¹¹ There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

- A. Through Moses, God instructed Israel regarding their responsibility to meet the needs of the poor in their community.
- B. The instructions could not be any clearer: "Be generous toward the poor." Because of greed and selfishness, God instructed His people to be kindhearted and generous.
- C. There are three pit-falls that must be avoided:
 - i. Since Israel had received the land in which they lived as a gift, God wanted them to understand that no one earned or deserved their possessions. We don't own anything here in this world.
 - ii. In Moses' day, debts were cancelled every seventh year. What if someone wanted to borrow some money with a year and a half remaining before the seventh or cancellation year? Suspicion - he is playing me for a fool, right? Such skepticism breeds hard hearts and tightfisted attitudes towards one's brother. God instructed His people to be open-handed to one in need and thereby receive all the blessings God wants to pour out on us.
 - iii. God also warned against holding a grudging attitude or having a stingy heart when we give. The Bible teaches that the poor will cry out to the LORD against you in the court of God's justice.
- D. Today well-meaning Christians will use Jesus' quotation of verse 11 "There will always be poor people in the land" (quoted in Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8) to justify neglect of the poor. Such an understanding twists the meaning of this verse. We are to combat poverty, God says, through loving acts of generosity regardless of the likelihood of repayment.

How Can We Help the Poor Today?

In our community there are several organizations that provide assistance to people experiencing financial crises and family difficulties. Organizations like the Salvation Army and our own St. John Food Bank provide much needed support for the poor.

While these organizations need the cooperative efforts of many for their financial resources to carry out their services, they could certainly benefit from people volunteering their time to forge the relationships which could possibly provide longer-lasting results.

Check the words below (or add one of your own) that best describes your attitude toward helping those in need around you. Then compare that to what we just read from Deuteronomy 15:7-11 and ask how God would evaluate those attitudes?

Reluctant Generous Annoyed Spontaneous
 Struggle Joyous Guilty Involved Other

2. Treat with Dignity - Deuteronomy 24:10-13

Deuteronomy 24:10-13

¹⁰ When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into his house to get what he is offering as a pledge. ¹¹ Stay outside and let the man to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. ¹² If the man is poor, do not go to sleep with his pledge in your possession. ¹³ Return his cloak to him by sunset so that he may sleep in it. Then he will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God.

- A. God stipulated that His people should treat with respect a neighbor who borrowed money.
- B. The lender could not barge into the poor person's home to collect the collateral. Instead, the lender must stand outside waiting for the borrower to bring the object.
- C. This allowed a man to borrow with honor, without having personal possessions being selected by the creditor for collateral.
- D. The biblical principle in Deuteronomy 24 urges us to protect people from embarrassment and treat them with dignity.
- E. All humans have value—they bear God's image and likeness (see Genesis 1:26-27).
- F. The outer garment served as cloak during the day and blanket during the night. Keeping it from the person would show utter contempt for his circumstances and would leave the borrower subject to the cold at night (see drawing on the right).
- G. Returning his cloak to him at sunset carried a blessed for the borrower and was counted as righteousness by the Lord.



Have You Ever Had to Borrow Something?

If you have ever received help, financial or otherwise, were you treated with dignity and respect? Or, were you made to feel a helpless, poor so-and-so, who was beneath the person lending you what you needed?

More important than the financial help you received is to ask if you have forgiven that person. If you have, great! If not, go to the Lord right now and pray for that person, asking God to grant you a forgiving attitude and spirit toward that person.

3. Protect with Mercy - Deut. 24:17-18

Deuteronomy 24:17-18

¹⁷ Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. ¹⁸ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

- A. The most helpless in their society—and ours today – are the aliens, orphans, and widows.
- B. God’s people are not to add insult to injury by denying them justice. The Hebrew word has the sense of stretching out or bending away justice from them.
- C. Denying justice might come in the form of showing favoritism or by taking bribes—neither of which reflect the God-like qualities God wanted His people to demonstrate.
- D. Consider similarities between the aliens in Moses’ day and immigrants in our country today. The immigration issues in our country confuse and divide us politically, socially, and economically. As people of faith, we are to look for ways to minister to immigrants trapped by their circumstances.
- E. Like foreigners, orphans had no legal standing and needed someone to defend them.
- F. Without normal family support, the fatherless could not plead their cases effectively so Moses nailed down that under no circumstances should judges deprive them of justice.
- G. Today, with the tragic escalation of family breakups, children need what a church family can provide through initiatives that provide love, security, and practical support.
- H. On the death of her husband, a widow was often taken advantage of and was prone to constant indebtedness.
- I. The prohibition to seizing her garment as security may indicate her loans required no collateral of any kind, thus not making a bad situation worse.
- J. God wanted the Israelites to remember their years spent in slavery in Egypt. It was a time of vulnerability, helplessness, and persecution and now could provide the motivation and sensitivity to treat the poor properly.
- K. As followers of Jesus, we are to imitate God in demonstrating love and mercy in all our relationships. When we care for those in need, we reflect the heart of our heavenly Father.

Erring on the Side of Grace

We are constantly approached for hand-outs and assistance for the poor. But how does one know when these needs are really legitimate or not? How do we know we are not just being scammed with another “sad, sad story?”

The answer is complicated in that there really is no “black or white” answer to this question. We cannot adopt the position that we answer all requests, nor to refuse all requests. Being good stewards of the blessings of God requires that we discern when needs are legitimate and grant the help; and when illegitimate, to refuse the help.

Sometimes we cannot be sure. Then, what are we to do? Err on the side of grace! Simply leave it in God’s hands to judge and provide the help.

Biblical Truths from Our Study

1. As Christians, we are to adopt a general policy of willingness to share with a neighbor to meet his/her needs.
2. Rather than hard hearts toward the poor, the Bible urges us to have generous spirits toward them.
3. Opening our hearts and hands allows us to receive our blessings from God, so we can pass those blessings on to others in need.
4. God calls us to reflect Him in our dealings with the world, by being both merciful and generous to those who may not always deserve either.
5. As followers of Jesus, we can protect and provide for the poor in our churches, neighborhoods, cities, and world.

How Personally Involved Are You?

On a scale of 1 (not involved) to 10 (highly involved), how personally involved are you in helping those in need?

__ 1 __ 2 __ 3 __ 4 __ 5 __ 6 __ 7 __ 8 __ 9 __ 10

Where would you want to give of your time and energy to help the poor in our community?

- a. Donate time in our Food Bank here at St. John?
- b. Help prepare meals for the poor at a “Soup Kitchen?”
- c. Donate time at a men’s or women’s shelter?
- d. Volunteer to deliver “Meals on Wheels?”
- e. Help sort food items at large Food Banks in the area?
- f. Donate school supplies for the kids in North Africa – “Our Lenten Help Project”
- g. Something else _____