

Giving to the Community

Devotional Reading: Exodus 20:12–17

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:1–11; Matthew 25:31–46;
Luke 10:25–37; James 1:27; 2:14–17

Today's Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:4–11; Matthew 25:42–45

I. Giving to Neighbors

Deuteronomy 15:4–11

4 Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it:

5 Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day.

6 For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.

7 If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:

8 But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.

9 Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto

the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee.

10 Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.

11 For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

4. The term *save* is a difficult translation. In certain contexts it means “no,” “nothing,” “only,” or “yet.” The solution here is to see its connection with the preceding verses, which discuss the cancellation of debts for the Israelites every seventh year. God’s intention is to *bless* His people. So the first part of this verse reminds the Israelites of God’s ultimate goal: *there shall be no poor among you*. The possibility of extinguishing poverty exists because God is poised to bless the people *greatly* in their obedience.

The Israelites dwell *in the land* only because God *giveth* it. Their *inheritance* was set in motion when God made His covenant with Abraham. They now have all they *possess* because of their relationship with God and His great blessings.

5. God's promise of blessing is conditional. The Israelites must obey His commands. The blessings promised for their careful obedience are protection, procreation, and prosperity. However, if the people of Israel disobey God's commands, He will bring curses upon them. Those curses include disease, famine, and domination by foreign nations.

Unfortunately, this warning is not one the Israelites ultimately heed. Future generations struggle to *carefully hearken unto* God's words and *observe* all His commands.

6. God promises to bless, and lying is outside of His holy nature. If God promises something, He will do it. The promises stated here are of abundance and preeminence. Up to this point in history, the descendants of Abraham have lived as either nomads or slaves; however, God promised He would make Abraham into a "great nation" (Genesis 12:2).

7. *If* indicates a prescription for times when the Israelites encounter poverty. As such, the instructions now move the narrative from the envisioned ideal to a future reality. That reality will include the continuous presence of *poor* people. In this case, God points to someone who is *thy brethren*, meaning a fellow Israelite, one's neighbor, a brother, or a friend. This person lacks the financial means to survive, and God calls His people to notice and offer aid (compare 1 John 3:17). God reminds His hearers that the land they dwell in was gifted to them. He then appeals to their hearts. Instead of callousness and selfishness, God calls for compassion and generosity.

8. God's expectation that His people hold material things loosely does not change in the transition from the old covenant to the new. God is the provider, and His children should consider all they have as gifts. When holding this perspective, benevolence flows naturally.

The verb *lend* here includes the idea "to

give a pledge," implying a security deposit of some kind to ensure that the money will be repaid. It is tempting to avoid lending to the poor because they do not possess the means to repay. Thus the need for a security deposit. Unfortunately, history shows this practice is subject to abuse. But God says His people have the responsibility to lend if it is within their power to do so.

The caveat *sufficient for his need* directs lenders concerning how much they should give. The term *wanteth* means "to lack" or "to be without."

9. *The seventh year* is the Sabbath year. God declares that every seven years, all debt is forgiven—this is *the year of release*. Suppose an individual asks for a loan of \$10,000 with a repayment plan of \$100 per month. If the plan is followed as outlined, the debtor will repay the loan in approximately 8 years. According to the Sabbath-year system, however, the loan must be forgiven at the end of the seventh year. The discrepancy might well discourage lenders. God realizes the possibility of such an attitude and speaks to it. He warns that withholding aid from someone who needs it may be considered *evil* and sinful because it shows something *wicked* in their hearts. When a needy person goes to God with a complaint against the generosity of God's people, God takes it seriously.

10. It is one thing to lend money out of obligation. It is another thing to lend money with a happy heart, knowing the funds may not be repaid. God's commands extend beyond the letter of the law to the action of the heart. The phrase *shall not be grieved* refers to the internal attitude of the giver. God's people are not to be saddened by sharing their means with others. When God's people follow His ways, He provides for their needs and blesses *all* they do—abundance in work, skill, and finance flows from generosity.

11. On the surface, this statement looks like a blatant contradiction of God's words just a few verses earlier (see Deuteronomy 15:4). Some commentators believe *the poor shall never cease out of the land* is a foreshadowing of Israel's refusal toward complete obedience. Others say it is a reminder that sin breeds poverty. No one can deny that hard times exist. Therefore, 15:4 refers to the ideal, and this verse faces a harsh reality.

Open and *wide* are purposefully repetitive. God essentially says, "Throw open your lives" in compassionate generosity. The image of an open hand contrasts starkly with the idea of a clenched fist. God calls His people to a broad, unobstructed benevolence.

The repetitive use of the term *thy* emphasizes ownership, which indicates responsibility. There is a relationship to consider: the underprivileged live alongside the wealthy and successful. They are part of the same *land*.

II. Giving to the Lord Matthew 25:42-45

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

42. Jesus is outside Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, when He makes this statement to His disciples. He speaks in first-person and boldly declares that when

I was hungry and thirsty, no one assisted. Like an undercover boss, the King comes incognito, and people fail to respond. The passage unfolds in an "I was" and "you did not" formula that pairs a needful condition with a subsequent reaction.

43. Under both the old and new covenants, God requires His people to care for others, with equal treatment. He calls His people to act with commonsense humanity. Through the prophet Isaiah, God urges true religion and fasting to be practiced by freeing captives, feeding the hungry, housing the exposed, and covering the naked. When Jesus sent His disciples out to preach God's kingdom and heal the sick, He declared, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). Hospitality results from a generous spirit.

44. Those condemned rebut, "But when did we ever see You like this?!" How could they be held responsible for something they did not know? Surely if they had seen Jesus in such a terrible condition, they would have come to His aid. If they had seen the *Lord* naked, *in prison*, or *sick*, they would have done something.

45. The faithfulness of God's people hinges on their treatment of *the least of these*. Judgment does not consider our knowledge, fame, or fortune. It is based on the help we give to others as an indicator of the grace we ourselves receive. To neglect those who are suffering is to neglect the Lord.

Considering our treatment of God's people as though we serve God Himself is the closest the Synoptic Gospels come to identifying the church as the body of Christ. The ways we're called to help are not extravagant. They are based upon responding to obvious needs. We are held responsible for how we react to what we know and see. James writes, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Involvement Learning

Giving to the Community

Into the Lesson

Describe a time when you experienced generosity.

Key Text

The poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.
—Deuteronomy 15:11

Into the Word

Read Deuteronomy 15:4–11. What is the central message of this passage?

How does the promise of blessing in verse 10 motivate generous giving?

How can the principle of canceling debts be applied in modernity?

How do you “open your hand” to those in need in the modern world?

How does this passage challenge our understanding of wealth and possessions?

Read Matthew 25:42–45. Define *neighbor* in your own words.

How does the biblical concept of neighbor differ from your common understanding?

How do consumerism and materialism impact our ability to practice generosity?

Into Life

List definitions or examples of neighbors for each column.

Traditional Neighbors

Biblical Neighbors

Write down a “neighbor” to whom you can show generosity this week. Explain one specific way you plan to express generosity to that person.

Thought to Remember

Give out of your rich inheritance!