

Wk 3 Sermon Series: "In His Footsteps- Caring for the Less Fortunate"

July 12, 2025

Opening Monologue

Welcome to our Summer Sermon Series, "In His Footsteps." This week's sermon is titled "Caring for the Less Fortunate." I hope you've been following along, but if you're just joining us, you can catch up on all the sermons so far—today marks week three—by visiting our YouTube channel, APP or Website.

It's so easy to get caught up in our own little worlds, isn't it? At least, I know I can. We become so consumed with the demands of life that we often overlook or simply don't notice those who are less fortunate than we are. It's not always intentional; it's more like something we don't make time for or that slips from our minds amidst our business.

Consider this staggering statistic about Jesus's ministry: "Jesus spent 85% of his time with the less fortunate—groups like the poor, the sick, sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, Gentiles, women, children, and others considered outcasts in first-century Jewish society, while he only debated, rebuked, or shamed the religious leaders of the day in 15% of his gospel interactions." (1) That's truly remarkable!

Today, we're going to dive deeply into this sensitive topic (per se) and align our hearts with the truth of God's Word. I believe each of us can grow in how we care for and serve those who are less fortunate.

"Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel." (Matthew 15:30-31)

In Christ,
Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "Week 3 Sermon Series: In His Footsteps/ Caring for the Less Fortunate" Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Texts

Matthew 15:30-31

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2015%3A30-31%20&version=NIV>

Matthew 25:35-41

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2025%3A35-41&version=NIV>

Acts 6:1-6

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%206%3A1-6%20&version=NIV>

Why are we called as Christians to take care of the less fortunate?

Christians are called to care for the less fortunate because it's rooted in the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, who emphasized love, compassion, and justice as central to faith. Here are the key reasons, grounded in Scripture:

1. Imitating Christ's Example: Jesus consistently showed compassion for the marginalized—feeding the hungry (John 6:1-13), healing the sick (Mark 1:34), and associating with sinners and outcasts (Luke 15:1-2). In Matthew 25:35-40, He says that caring for the “least of these”—those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, or imprisoned—is equivalent to serving Him.

2. God's Command to Love: The Bible commands love for neighbor as a core principle (Mark 12:31). This love extends especially to those in need, as seen in passages like Leviticus 19:9-10, which instructs leaving resources for the poor, and Luke 14:13-14, where Jesus calls for inviting the poor and disabled to feasts.

3. Reflecting God's Justice and Mercy: God's character is one of justice and mercy, particularly for the vulnerable (Psalm 146:7-9). Caring for the less fortunate aligns with God's heart, as He defends the cause of the widow, orphan, and stranger (Deuteronomy 10:18). Christians are called to reflect this in their actions (Micah 6:8).

4. Faith in Action: James 2:14-17 teaches that faith without works is dead. Caring for the less fortunate is a tangible expression of genuine faith, demonstrating the transformative power of the Gospel. Similarly, 1 John 3:17-18 urges believers to love "in deed and truth," not just words.

5. Building God's Kingdom: Acts of compassion point to the values of God's kingdom, where the last will be first (Matthew 20:16). By serving the less fortunate, Christians witness to a world of God's love and hope, countering selfishness and injustice. This calling isn't just about charity but about living out a faith that seeks to restore dignity and meet needs, reflecting God's redemptive work.

Biblical Examples of Caring for those in need

The Bible provides numerous examples of caring for the less fortunate, modeling the Christian call to compassion and justice. Below are key biblical examples, drawn from both the Old and New Testaments, that illustrate this responsibility in action. Each example highlights practical ways to serve the marginalized and reflects God's heart for the vulnerable.

Old Testament Examples

1. Boaz's Care for Ruth (Ruth 2):

Context: Ruth, a widowed foreigner, was gleaning in the fields to

survive. Boaz, a wealthy landowner, not only allowed her to gather grain but went beyond the law's requirement (Leviticus 19:9-10) by instructing his workers to leave extra grain for her and ensuring her safety.

Application: Boaz's generosity shows how Christians can use their resources to provide for those in need, offering not just the minimum but abundant care. This can inspire modern acts like donating extra food or ensuring safe spaces for the vulnerable.

2. The Widow of Zarephath and Elijah (1 Kings 17:8-16):

Context: A poor widow, facing starvation, shared her last meal with the prophet Elijah at God's command. In return, God miraculously provided her with an unending supply of flour and oil.

Application: Even those with little can show faith through generosity. This encourages Christians to share what they have, trusting God to provide, like giving time or resources despite personal scarcity.

3. God's Provision for the Poor in the Law (Leviticus 19:9-10, Deuteronomy 24:19-21):

Context: God's law instructed Israelites to leave the edges of their fields unharvested and not to pick up dropped crops, ensuring the poor and foreigners could glean food. This was a systemic way to care for the less fortunate.

Application: This models creating intentional opportunities for the poor to access resources with dignity, like supporting community gardens or job programs that empower rather than demean.

4. Job's Righteousness in Caring for the Needy (Job 29:12-16):

Context: Job described his life of righteousness, saying he rescued the poor, helped the orphan, supported the widow, and was "eyes to the blind and feet to the lame." His wealth was used to uplift the marginalized.

Application: Job's example encourages Christians to actively seek out and meet the needs of the disadvantaged, whether through

financial aid, advocacy, or personal involvement.

New Testament Examples

1. Jesus Feeding the 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21):

Context: Jesus, moved by compassion for a hungry crowd, multiplied five loaves and two fish to feed thousands, ensuring everyone had enough and there were leftovers.

Application: This shows the power of small resources, when blessed by God, to meet great needs. Christians can emulate this by organizing food drives or sharing meals with those in need, trusting God to multiply efforts.

2. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37):

Context: In this parable, a Samaritan helped a beaten, abandoned man, tending his wounds, paying for his care, and ensuring his recovery—unlike religious leaders who passed by. Jesus used this to define “neighbor” as anyone in need.

Application: This calls Christians to cross cultural or social barriers to help those in distress, like offering aid to strangers or supporting refugees and the homeless with practical care.

3. Jesus’ Ministry to the Marginalized (Luke 4:18-19, Matthew 9:35-36):

Context: Jesus proclaimed His mission to bring good news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, and set captives free. He consistently ministered to outcasts—tax collectors, sinners, lepers, and the poor—showing compassion and restoring dignity.

Application: Christians are called to prioritize the overlooked, whether by visiting the sick, supporting addiction recovery programs, or advocating for those society ignores.

4. The Early Church’s Generosity (Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4:32-35):

Context: Early believers shared their possessions, sold property, and distributed resources so that “there were no needy persons among them.” They cared for widows and others in need (Acts 6:1-6).

Application: This models communal responsibility, encouraging Christians to pool resources through church or community efforts, like creating funds for struggling families or supporting local ministries.

5. Zacchaeus’ Repentance and Restitution (Luke 19:1-10):

Context: Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, responded to Jesus by giving half his possessions to the poor and repaying those he cheated fourfold, showing a transformed heart.

Application: This challenges Christians to examine their wealth and make amends for past wrongs, perhaps by donating to causes that address economic injustice or supporting fair trade initiatives.

6. The Widow’s Offering (Mark 12:41-44):

Context: A poor widow gave two small coins—her entire livelihood—to the temple treasury, which Jesus praised as greater than the large gifts of the wealthy.

Application: Her sacrificial giving shows that caring for others isn’t about the amount but the heart. Christians can give generously, even if it’s time or small acts, like helping a neighbor with groceries.

Key Themes and Practical Takeaways

These examples highlight recurring themes: compassion, generosity, justice, and dignity. They show that caring for the less fortunate involves both individual acts (like the Good Samaritan’s aid) and systemic efforts (like the gleaning laws). Christians can apply these today by:

- **Meeting Immediate Needs:** Provide food, clothing, or shelter (e.g., volunteering at a food pantry).
- **Empowering the Vulnerable:** Create opportunities for self-sufficiency, like job training or education programs.
- **Sacrificial Giving:** Share resources generously, even when it’s costly, trusting God’s provision.

- **Crossing Barriers:** Serve those outside your social or cultural circle, like immigrants or the homeless.
 - **Community Action:** Work with churches or groups to address poverty collectively.
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Commentary on Main Texts:

Matthew 25:31-46 JESUS TELLS ABOUT THE FINAL JUDGMENT

This so-called “parable of the sheep and goats” is not truly a parable but a metaphor around which Jesus builds his message of judgment and salvation.

25:31-33 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.” This verse pictures Jesus when he will return, not as the humble carpenter from Nazareth but in his glory. The sight will be spectacular when the angels accompany the Son and we see him on his throne in heavenly glory (see also 16:27-28; 24:30-31; Zechariah 14:5). He will come as Judge, for “all the nations will be gathered before him.” This fulfills Psalm 110:1, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’ ” (NIV). Jesus had quoted from this psalm in 22:41-45, applying the words to himself. Paul later wrote, “For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Corinthians 5:10 NRSV).

“And he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.”

Jesus used sheep and goats to picture the division between believers and unbelievers. Sheep and goats often grazed together but were separated at night because the goats needed a warm shelter at night (their coats are not nearly as thick) while sheep preferred open air.

In the parable of the wheat and the weeds (13:24-30), Jesus had talked about a final separation at the Last Judgment. The sheep and goats grazed together; the wheat and weeds grew together. At the end, however, Jesus, the Judge, will separate people one from another.

While all “nations” are before him, he will separate individuals, for each individual is responsible for his or her own salvation (as seen in the parable of the bridesmaids, 25:1–13). This “separation” became a picture for the Last Judgment. The gathering and separating, part of the shepherd’s duties, further united the concept of the Son of Man as both Shepherd and Judge. (See also Ezekiel 34:17–23.)

GOD’S PLAN

When Jesus first called his disciples, he said, “Come, follow.” Here, at the end, he said to all his disciples, “Come, take.” What can we learn about our spiritual pilgrimage during the time in between?

- Jesus is forever calling us closer to himself. We are never too close, never close enough. Jesus invites us closer all the time.
- Spiritual life is movement. We’re always approaching (or conversely, retreating from) God, never standing still. All the physical movements in your life (changing jobs, changing homes, traveling to serve others) are pictures of your spiritual journey: moving closer to God, finding how faith works, reaching heavenly goals. All the emotional movement in your life (loves found and lost, loved ones dying and new ones born) reflect the need we all have to find a stable place to build our lives. That stable place is a person, the Lord Jesus.

You are God’s plan. Since the very moment of creation, the wonderful kingdom of God—you included—has been the goal that now comes to its fullness and finality. You have been part of the world’s most important movement—faithfully living as a disciple of Jesus—and now you are part of the world’s biggest celebration. Are you lucky? No, you are God’s plan, now fulfilled.

25:34 “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.’ ” The “sheep” were at the king’s right side, referring to a position of honor. Sheep were more commercially valuable than goats, and throughout Scripture they are an image for God’s people. Thus here they are identified as “the elect,” God’s chosen people, as seen in the words “take ... the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” This kingdom, existing from the beginning of time, is sure and unchangeable. Believers need never doubt its existence, nor

the glory of it as their inheritance. This inheritance had been God's plan for them since the creation of the world.

25:35-36 “‘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.’ ” This list describes acts of mercy people can do every day. These acts do not depend on wealth, ability, or intelligence; they are simple acts freely given and freely received. No special “talent” is needed. Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for others' needs (Isaiah 58:7). That this list is repeated four times in this parable indicates its importance as a guide for practical discipleship. The list is not exhaustive; instead, it represents all types of good deeds. This parable is not teaching salvation by good deeds, but evidence of salvation through good deeds.

25:37-39 “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 go to visit you?’ ” The righteous are surprised at the King's words. He commends them for their acts of kindness to him, but they realize that they did not have opportunity to do such kindnesses to him directly.

25:40 “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ ” The basis of reward rests on the acts of kindness each individual believer did for other believers (these who are members of my family), for in so doing, they did those kindnesses for the King himself. Jesus himself, through the Holy Spirit, is present in even the most humble, lowly, or “insignificant” follower of Christ.

CONCERN FOR THE POOR

Concern and care for the poor are essential to truly biblical

Christianity.

We are not to take advantage of the needy. (Exodus 22:25–27)

We are not to charge interest or make a profit on food sold to them.

(Leviticus 25:35–37)

Every third year the tithe was to be given to poor people.

(Deuteronomy 14:28–29)

We are instructed to give generously to the poor. (Deuteronomy 15:11; Matthew 6:2–4)

Jesus had special concern for the place of the poor. (Luke 4:18–19; 6:20–21)

Paul was eager to remember the poor. (Galatians 2:10)

The Bible teaches that Christians should care for the poor, so what can you do?

Feed the poor.

Contribute to a food relief organization.

Volunteer to help in a community program.

Work through your church to develop a project to help the needy.

Consider giving extra tithe to help ministries that assist the poor.

Secure justice for the poor.

Help widows, orphans, aliens, and the oppressed.

Help agencies that work for housing, education, and job opportunities for needy people.

Uphold the cause of the poor.

Stand against oppression.

Intercede for even one person.

Write to Christian missions and encourage them to support the cause of the poor.

Tell your deacons that you will help a poor person under their supervision.

There has been much discussion about the identity of the “family members.” Some have said they are the Jews; others say they are the apostles and/or all Christians; still others say they are poor and needy people everywhere. Such a debate is much like the lawyer’s question to Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). The point of this parable

is not the “who” but the “what”—the importance of serving where service is needed. Jesus’ original intent seems to be that how we treat lowly and needy fellow Christians determines how truly we love Jesus. If Christians who have resources would help needy fellow Christians, non-Christians would be totally persuaded of the validity of Christian love. Such love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for him. But that does not excuse our broader responsibility to show love and mercy to everyone in need.

25:41 “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 the goats (those on his left), however, the story is different. These “goats,” mingling every day as they did with the sheep, may have thought that they could get by unnoticed. But God would separate them, and their judgment would be severe. There will be no middle ground at the final judgment—either a person is a “sheep” or a “goat.” And the result will be either “the kingdom” (25:34) or eternal fire (referring to hell) and separation from God forever (indicated by the words “depart from me”).

Eternal punishment takes place in hell (that is, the lake of fire or Gehenna), which is the place of punishment after death for all those who refuse to repent. In the Bible, three words are used in connection with eternal punishment: (1) Sheol, or “the grave,” is used in the Old Testament to mean the place of the dead, generally thought to be under the earth. (See Job 24:19; Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 38:10.) (2) “Hades” is the Greek word for the underworld, the realm of the dead. It is the word used in the New Testament for Sheol. (See Matthew 16:18; Revelation 1:18; 20:13–14.) (3) Gehenna, or hell, was named after the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem where children had been sacrificed by fire to the pagan gods (see 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3). This is the place of eternal fire (Matthew 5:22; 10:28; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5; James 3:6; Revelation 19:20) prepared for the devil, his angels, and all those who do not believe in Christ (Revelation 20:9–10). This is the final and eternal state of the wicked after the resurrection and the Last Judgment.

25:42–43 “‘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.’ ” The sin noted by the King was (as in the parables of the bridesmaids and the talents) not active evil-doing but failure to do good. The apostle James later wrote, “Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin” (James 4:17 NRSV). As in 25:35–36, the list is not comprehensive, but it represents good deeds that people often fail to do. Doing wrong in ignorance may be excusable (see Acts 3:17; 1 Timothy 1:13), but when believers neglect to help those in need, they disobey Christ. These actions do not take special talents, gifts, or lifestyles. One need not be rich to carry these out. Failure to do them then, as with the man who buried the talent, shows a lack of love for Christian brothers and, by extension, for the Lord himself.

25:44-45 “Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ” The evildoers, also, were surprised at the King’s words. How could he say that they had neglected to do acts of kindness to him personally when, in reality, that would seem to be an impossibility? So he explained that in neglecting to do these kindnesses to even the least of the Christian brothers and sisters, they had neglected to do so for him. By that neglect, they had shown no true salvation, for their salvation had not manifested itself in good deeds, as it would naturally do. Their failures were not acts of wickedness, but refusals to do good and to show compassion.

25:46 “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” God will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers, and their destinies will be vastly different. The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all persons we encounter as if they are Jesus is not easy, for we may not know if they are believers. What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus’ words to us—feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay, look after the sick. How well do your actions separate you from pretenders and unbelievers? Will

you be sent away to the place of everlasting punishment or into eternal life?

Matthew 15:30-31

Then great multitudes came to Him: Though Jesus briefly withdrew from the multitudes, He did not do so permanently. He still had work to do among the great multitudes.

Most commentators believe this marks a unique period in the ministry of Jesus, when He did His healing and providing work in the predominately Gentile region of Galilee. Especially correlating this with Mark 7:31–37, we see that this happened on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, the region known as the Decapolis. As well, the remoteness of the place (in the wilderness, Mathew 15:33) fits better with the eastern side.

“These people were most probably heathen or semi-heathen, gathered from the region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31).” (Morgan)

As Jesus healed and provided for this mixed or predominately Gentile multitude, it showed that the Gentiles in fact were getting more than just a few crumbs from the table.

They laid them down at Jesus’ feet, and He healed them: In this incident we read nothing about any faith on the part of those who were healed, except for the fact that they came to Jesus for help.

“Among those brought were certain classed as kullous [maimed], which is usually interpreted ‘bent,’ as with rheumatism. But in Matthew 18:8 it seems to mean ‘mutilated’ ... Grotius argues for this sense, and infers that among Christ’s works of healing were the restoration of lost limbs, though we do not read of such anywhere else.” (Bruce)

They glorified the God of Israel: Even in something as potentially self-promoting as ministry of healing, Jesus always drew attention to God the Father, the God of Israel. This multitude—most likely predominately Gentile—learned to praise the God of Israel.

“The expression suggests a non-Israelite crowd and seems to hint that after all for our evangelist Jesus is on the east side and in heathen territory.” (Bruce)

Acts 6:1-6

From arrests at the hands of the Jews to the attempted deception within the congregation, the early days of the church seemed difficult. Yet the growth was phenomenal! Chapter 6 returns to an internal problem—some apparent discrepancies in the distribution of goods to the needy widows in the congregation. The result: complaints from those who thought they were being discriminated against and a rising tide of anger. It was a potential disaster. But the Spirit-filled apostles wisely solved the young church's problem.

The rapid growth of the church meant more people. More people meant more programs and larger ministries. More programs meant administrative and logistical problems that threatened to consume all the apostles' time. Rather than neglect the spiritual disciplines of prayer and teaching, the apostles called and commissioned a group of men to attend to the pressing needs of the body. Finding qualified people who can and will help share the load of work is a mark of a healthy congregation.

6:1 But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. The number of believers in Jerusalem made it necessary to organize the sharing of resources. People were being overlooked, and some were complaining. The believers who spoke Hebrew were the native Jewish Christians, "locals" who spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language. The believers who spoke Greek were the Grecian Jews from other lands who had been converted at Pentecost. They could not speak Aramaic, the native tongue of the Jews living in Israel. They were probably at least bilingual, speaking their native tongue and Greek but not Aramaic. There had developed a class distinction between the two groups, similar to racism. Though all were Christians, their backgrounds and outlooks were different.

The Greek-speaking Christians complained that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. There were many more widows than usual since many of the widows who came from other Greek-speaking countries had returned to Jerusalem to live

out their years and be buried with their ancestors. Their money may have run out, and they needed help. Widows in general needed help since property was passed on from father to son, and the son was responsible to care for the mother. She had no wealth of her own. (It should be noted that early in church history, “widows” became a recognized group worthy of help from the church—see 9:41; 1 Timothy 5:3–16.) This “discrimination” against the Greek-speaking believers was more likely caused by the language and class barrier.

The early church took seriously the meeting of both the physical needs (distributing food and supplies) and the spiritual needs (teaching the Word) of the body of believers.

NO PERFECT CHURCH

When we read the descriptions of the early church—the miracles, the sharing and generosity, the fellowship—we may wish we could have been a part of this “perfect” church. In reality, the early church had problems just as we do today. No church has ever been or will ever be perfect until Christ returns. All churches have problems. If your church’s shortcomings distress you, ask yourself: “Would a perfect church allow me to be a member?” Then do what you can to make your church better. A church does not have to be perfect to be a powerful and effective witness for Christ.

6:2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.” Out of the conflict there arose a meeting. The Twelve (referring to the apostles) gathered all the disciples (referring to the rest of the believers) together and made a statement. They noted that it would not be right for them to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. From both physical energy and time restraints, it would be impossible for them to do both. The Greek here translated “wait on tables” is literally “to serve tables” (*diakonein trapezais*), which could refer to the tables used for serving food or maybe even for passing out funds to those in need. The reason was not that the apostles thought that they were “above” waiting on tables; rather, they knew that they had been called to preach and teach the Word of God, and that had to be their priority.

6:3-4 “Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves

seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” To correct the situation, the apostles said that the believers

should choose respected Greek-speaking men and put them in charge of the food distribution program. Five requirements were clearly spelled out: the candidates had to be (1) men (andras—a specific Greek term for men); (2) believers (from among yourselves); (3) possessing good reputations (good standing), known as men of integrity; (4) solid spiritually (full of the Spirit); (5) full of wisdom—demonstrating their ability to apply God’s truth appropriately to life situations. Seven was the typical number of men used to handle public business in a Jewish town, the official council.

MATCHING GIFTS WITH NEEDS

As the early church increased in size, so did its needs. One great need was to organize the distribution of food to the poor. Since the apostles were called to focus on preaching and praying (6:4), they chose others to administer the food program. A prominent New Testament teaching is that each person has a vital part to play in the life of the church (see 1 Corinthians 12). If you are in a position of leadership and find yourself overwhelmed with responsibilities, prayerfully determine what your priorities should be, and then find others to respond to the other legitimate needs. If you are not in leadership, realize that you have gifts that can be used by God in various areas of the church’s ministry. Serve him with these gifts.

“Fullness” of the Spirit means a Spirit-following lifestyle. To be “full of the Spirit” was not an elitist position; instead, it indicated a mature, healthy Christian life. These people had demonstrated that the Spirit was working in them.

The person who was full of wisdom (sophias) would have demonstrated the ability to get to the best ends by the best means; that is, someone who had common sense. People who carry heavy responsibilities and work closely with others should have these qualities. We must look for spiritually mature and wise men and women to lead our churches.

The apostles kept their priorities straight. They were successful in part because they realized that both tasks were important: the task of

meeting the physical needs of the church body and the task of meeting the spiritual and educational needs of the body. They had to ask themselves the basic question: since we can only do some things, which of these many good things to do are the most important and the most appropriate for us? For the apostles, the answer was clearly praying and teaching the Word, as they had been commissioned to do.

EVERY MEMBER A MINISTER

The apostles' priorities were correct. The ministry of the Word should never be neglected because of administrative burdens. Pastors should not try, or be expected to try, to do everything. Instead, full-time ministers are called to "equip God's people to ... build up the church" (Ephesians 4:12 NLT). That's the New Testament model: in every church each and every member is a minister! By getting believers involved in this way, churches are able to utilize and enjoy the gifts that have been given to each person, thus multiplying their impact.

6:5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. The whole group (meaning all the believers) was pleased with the solution, so seven men were chosen, though how this was done was not recorded. Stephen and Philip were likely placed first because they are the only two whose ministries will be explained later in Acts (chapters 7–8). All seven of these names are Greek, which means that the men were probably Hellenistic Jews. This would lay a good foundation for the future spread of the gospel to the Greek world. Nothing more is known about Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, or Nicolas.

6:6 They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. Spiritual leadership is serious business and must not be taken lightly by the church or its leaders. In the early church, those chosen to serve would be ordained or commissioned (set apart by prayer and laying on of hands) by the apostles. Laying hands on someone, an ancient Jewish practice, was a way to set a person apart for special service (see Numbers 27:23; Deuteronomy 34:9).

Were these men the church's first deacons? Some say these were not deacons, deacon-predecessors, or even elder-predecessors but rather temporary, nonofficial positions created to meet the need at hand. They are never called "deacons" but rather "the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food" (21:8 NLT). The word "serve" (diakonein) in 6:2 is used elsewhere in Acts to describe acts of service, not to signify an office of deacon (see 1:17, 25; 11:29; 12:25; 19:22; 20:24; 21:19). There is no denying, however, that the seven men performed the function of deacons as the office would later be defined.

That the apostles laid their hands on them was a common gesture used in the commissioning of individuals to a task or office. It was also a granting of some sort of authority (see 8:17–19; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; Hebrews 6:2). The apostles were hereby identifying themselves with the seven men and granting them a portion of their authority, at least for the task at hand.

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Program, Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, Guzik, David, Life Application Bible Commentary, Factbook Logos bible, Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1995, Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. Barton, Bruce B. 1996. Matthew. Life Application Bible Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. Guzik, David. 2013. Matthew. David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible. Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik. Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. Acts. Life Application Bible Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.

Sermon Notes:

Week 3 - In His Footsteps: Caring for the Less Fortunate

We are in a sermon series titled "In His Footsteps," showing how Christians and the Early Church followed the example of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels.

Last week's sermon was titled "Everyone's Important." Truly, everyone is important. I can take time off, call on the elders and ministry teams, and things run smoothly—like you don't even need me! [Laughter] Let's thank our elders, Bryan, Jerry, and our ministry teams.

Before we dive into God's Word today, here are the AVC connections:

- YouTube
- App
- Facebook/Website

As I've said before, the Gospels of Jesus Christ are the power source for the rest of the Bible, particularly the New Testament. In the Gospels, Jesus showed His followers how to live an authentic Christian life. And in the rest of the New Testament, we see Christians living it out.

I've titled today's sermon "Caring for the Less Fortunate." Jesus made a bold statement in what is called the

Final Judgment. Let's read from Matthew 25:35-41:

The King said to those on the right... come into heaven]
"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 go 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.'"

[Jesus also said 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 needed clothes and you didn't clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you never looked after me."]

Wow! That's a powerful punch to start a sermon, isn't it? [Laughter]
Some of you are sweating, thinking, "I've never visited anyone in prison!" But listen: Jesus didn't cheer for the heroes; He cheered for the zeros. Think about it—Jesus didn't call religious leaders to be His

disciples, not a single one. Instead, He called fishermen, tax collectors, a zealot, tradesmen, and even a money handler who would later betray Him.

Remember in elementary school when you picked teams?

[Team Captain Story]

- You'd pick the fastest, the strongest, the tallest—because you wanted to win!
- (Story of Softball)

Back in the day, I was a big softball player, playing over 100 games a year, traveling around the state for tournaments. I had it in my mind that I was going to win the state softball championship. I played with 40 guys who were good, picked out the best players—the “heroes”—made it to the state qualifiers, and we got smoked!

The problem in America today is that we idolize heroes based on wealth, success, fame, and fantasy land, cheering them on. This is a huge issue for our children and teens growing up.

Let's look at some profound statistics about Jesus' time in the Gospels. Jesus spent 85% of His time with the less fortunate—groups like the poor, the sick, tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, Samaritans, Gentiles, women, children, and many others considered outcasts in first-century Jewish society. He only spent 15% of His time around religious leaders, typically debating and ridiculing them. That's stunning!

Here's the heartbeat of the Gospels. Let's read Matthew 15:30-31:

“Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.”

Here's the real and raw truth: Jesus demonstrated His compassion, and the Early Church and Christians followed His example.

Let's read Acts 6:1-6:

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Preston, Victor, Timothy, Patrick, and Nicholas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.”

In conclusion, here are some spiritual applications we can take away:

**** Caring for the Less Fortunate - Spiritual Applications****

- It’s a responsibility for all Christians to help those in need.
 - Look for someone to pray with or encourage.
 - Remember Jesus’ words: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).
-

Devotional Questions

Read the Passages and answer the following questions

Matthew 25:35-46

1. Reflection on Service: How can I actively serve those who are hungry, thirsty, and in need, reflecting Jesus’ love in a tangible way? What specific actions can I take to serve “the least of these” in my own community?

2. Self-Examination of Attitudes: Jesus identifies with those in need. Do I recognize His presence in the people I encounter who are marginalized or in need of help? What might be hindering me from seeing and serving Christ through them?

Matthew 15:30-31

1. Recognition of Needs: How do I respond to the needs of those who come to me for help or healing, much like the crowds did to Jesus? In what ways can I pray for and support those who are suffering around me?

2. Worship and Gratitude: After witnessing Jesus' healing, the people praised God. How often do I express gratitude for the works of God in my life and in the lives of others? How can I cultivate a heart of praise, even when I'm not directly experiencing healing or miracles?

Acts 6:1-6

1. Community and Fairness: The early church addressed the needs of the neglected widows by organizing and distributing resources. How can I ensure that I am contributing to fairness and justice within my own community or church?

2. Call to Action and Roles: The apostles appointed others to serve in specific roles. What gifts or talents has God given me that I can use to serve His people more effectively? How can I step into those roles with faithfulness and commitment?