



Studies in the Psalms Keys to the Joyful Life 3

Summary: The joyful life involves knowing that God cares for the poor and weak and modeling it yourself.

Today the term “social justice” provokes an immediate reaction in many people – some get excited, while others feel provoked. We are not going to deal with the issue as it appears in the culture, but we are going to look at what God has to say about the poor and weak in society this morning and learn that there is a blessing for those who care for the most fragile and vulnerable members of our family, church, and community.

But why? Why are we talking about this today? Is it because it’s a hot topic in the culture? No. It’s because we are spending time in the Psalms this summer looking at the keys to the blessed life. We’re tracking this phrase “[Blessed is the man who...](#)” across the Psalms and learning that it shows up quite frequently. The Psalms have much to tell us about what brings, or prevents a blessed life, life as it was meant to be, characterized by wholeness, joy, peace, health, prosperity, and balance.

And this morning, we see that one key to discovering and enjoying this blessed life, is to consider the weak and the poor. So let’s read Psalm 41 and then discuss the issues. As we do, I want to encourage you to ask God to help you lower your defenses and listen to Him because it’s very likely that you have strong opinions about some issues that will come up. I’m asking you to set those aside and give God the chance to speak to you through His Word.

Read with me:

[To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.](#)
[Ps 41:1 Blessed is he who considers the poor;](#)

Your translation may have weak, or helpless, we’ll come back to that later to explain why.

[The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.](#)
[2 The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive,](#)
[And he will be blessed on the earth;](#)
[You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.](#)
[3 The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness;](#)
[You will sustain him on his sickbed.](#)

So, David says, if you are considerate toward the poor or weak, when poverty, weakness or illness come *your way*, God will preserve and protect you, even if others don’t. He’s

speaking from personal experience as we're about to see. There was a time when David was sick and people did not treat him so well:

4 I said, "LORD, be merciful to me;
Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You."
5 My enemies speak evil of me:
"When will he die, and his name perish?"
6 And if he comes to see me, he speaks lies;
His heart gathers iniquity to itself;
When he goes out, he tells it.

David was sick in bed and people would come to visit him, but they didn't really care about his condition, they just wanted to see what was going on so they could go out and have something to talk about – to spread rumors and gossip. It was morbid curiosity. Meanwhile other people who never really liked him anyway ganged up on him.

7 All who hate me whisper together against me;
Against me they devise my hurt.
8 "An evil disease," they say, "clings to him.
And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more."
9 Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted,
Who ate my bread,
Has lifted up his heel against me.

David is laying in bed, physically ill, and if that's not bad enough, people are saying all kinds of things about him and against him. Even some of his friends are beginning to pull back.

But God. God is not like that. God does not pull away from us when we're sick or suffering or life is falling apart, God actually presses into our lives in those moments offering us His comfort and strength when they don't come from anywhere else.

10 But You, O LORD, be merciful to me, and raise me up,
That I may repay them.
11 By this I know that You are well pleased with me,
Because my enemy does not triumph over me.
12 As for me, You uphold me in my integrity,
And set me before Your face forever.

Other people were whispering that David's sickness and suffering were sign of a judgment from God. That's not what David says. He knows he has sinned, like all of us, none of us are perfect, but he asks God for forgiveness, and he believes God is well pleased with him. God is actually the one thing David can count on when everyone and everything else feel like they're against him. When his strength is gone, when popular support is gone, when friends are gone, David knows and believes that God is still there and he praises God for it.

13 Blessed be the LORD God of Israel

From everlasting to everlasting!
Amen and Amen.

We can summarize Psalm 41 like this: Blessed is the person who considers the poor and learns that God is with them.

So, assuming that we do want to be blessed, let's think about what this says.

The word 'consider' in verse 1 is important, *Blessed is he who considers the poor* or has regard for the poor. There is a blessing for those who *are concerned* for the weak, who not only see their condition, but are captured by it, think about it, give their condition sustained reflection. Because the attention you're giving is often what God uses to move you toward action.

It's easy to give pretty people your time and attention, it's easy to follow influencers online. It's easy to spend time and energy focused on people you gain something from. It's not so easy or automatic to give time and energy and focus to people or issues that are going to cost you something. *But Scripture says there is a blessing that comes from it.*

OK but who are the poor, who are these people we should consider and think about? We in America tend to think of poverty almost exclusively in financial terms. The poor are those who do not have much money.

But, as I mentioned earlier, some translations use 'the weak' or 'the helpless' here instead. Notice that in the Psalm, David is the king of Israel, he's certainly not scrounging for a few shekels to pay the rent or feed the family. Instead, he talks of being sick in bed. So the 'poor' are those who suffer from a lack of power, strength, or vitality – they suffer because their life is not what it is meant to be.

That might mean physical poverty, or what we call being in 'poor health' due to an injury or illness. If you suffer from chronic pain that is a poverty of health. If you battle Lyme's disease or Crohns, or cancer, there is a certain kind of limitation you face in life, an extra weight you carry, a loss of freedom and strength.

You can also have relational poverty – to be without friends or family or a trusted support network. That could be because you're getting older and feeling isolated. Or it could be because you're young and new to the city. Or it could be because all you do is stay at home with the kids all day, or all you do is go to work all day, and you don't have anyone that you could really connect with and share your life.

To be poor is really to experience a lack of agency. To feel as though life is happening to you instead of being able to affect it. To wish and want for things to be better, but to be stuck where you are. These are all ideas wrapped up in the word that can be translated as poor, weak, or helpless because they all overlap.

Several years ago the World Bank surveyed people around the globe to try and understand how people in poverty see their lives. They gave answers like this:

A person in the West African nation of Cameroon said: “{The poor have} a feeling of powerlessness and an inability to make themselves heard.”

A person from Vietnam said: “If you are hungry, you will always be hungry, if you are poor, you will always be poor.”

A woman from Uganda said: “When one is poor, she has no say in public, she feels inferior. She has no food; so there is famine in her house; no clothing, and no progress in her family”

And a person from Moldova said: “For a poor person everything is terrible—illness, humiliation, shame. We are cripples; we are afraid of everything; we depend on everyone. No one needs us. We are like garbage that everyone wants to get rid of.”

Notice they speak not simply in terms of material poverty, but also in terms of the psychological and social impact that comes from feeling weak, helpless, and trapped. In their excellent book *When Helping Hurts*, authors Stephen Corbett and Brian Fikkert make the following observation:

North [Americans] tend to emphasize a lack of material things such as food, money, clean water, medicine, housing, etc. ...

Poor people typically talk in terms of shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, social isolation, and voicelessness.

We'll talk more about this in a moment, but for now, I just want to point out that the kinds of things North Americans emphasize when defining poverty are the kind of things that Jesus said not to worry about, and the things that the poor use to describe their experience are the all the kinds of things that Jesus said He cared about. Which is why, I want to argue, there is a blessing for those who will [consider the poor](#).

But, before we can go any further, we need to talk about a very touchy and controversial subject: why are the poor, poor in the first place? Well, we have said many times, there are four Biblical reasons for suffering. The first is spiritual forces. The Bible clearly communicates that it is possible for pain and poverty to be caused by demonic powers, which only sounds crazy until you've seen it. The second reason is natural disaster or calamity – things like storms, famine, pandemics, recessions, inflation come along and plunge people into suffering and poverty through no fault of their own.

The third is oppression and interference – so one person or group uses their power against another person or group and either forces them into poverty and suffering, or uses their power to hold them there. And the fourth is personal sin, things like laziness or addiction that can lead to a loss of employment and sabotage personal health.

Tim Keller, in his book, *Ministries of Mercy*, points out that political parties emphasize these third and fourth reasons almost exclusively. So Liberals tend to focus on oppression and injustice as root causes of poverty and powerlessness and say if we could just fix these problems people would begin to rise out of poverty. Conservatives tend to focus on personal sin and say if people would just work harder and take advantage of the opportunities they already have, they could lift themselves out of poverty.

The truth is, the sources tend to overlap and can be present simultaneously to varying degrees. Imagine the man who hurts his back and then becomes hooked on painkillers and alcohol to cope with the pain and is fired from his job because he can't keep up with the boss's quotas, he loses his medical insurance, things become stressful at home, so he lashes out at his kids and eventually his wife leaves him. There's a lot of things going wrong there, some that he could control and some that he could not, like the sudden back injury which started it all.

But the question is not what do political conservatives think about the man's problems, or what do political progressives think should be done? The question is, what does Jesus have to say to him? How does God view his situation? And the answer is:

Ps 41:1 Blessed is he who considers the poor, the helpless, the weak;

Because God considers them.

Turn with me to Matthew 25 where Jesus describes His second coming:

Matthew 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Let that capture your attention – Jesus says, people are going to be divided into two categories. And this group of people, on His right hand, are going to be blessed by the Father. Why? He tells them

35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

But they don't understand, they never did any of these things *for Jesus*, He wasn't here. What do you mean we cared about You and took care of You?

37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and

take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? 39 Or when did we see *You* sick, or in prison, and come to *You*? 40 And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these *My* brethren, you did *it* to *Me*.’ 41 “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from *Me*, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 for I was hungry and you gave *Me* no food; I was thirsty and you gave *Me* no drink; 43 I was a stranger and you did not take *Me* in, naked and you did not clothe *Me*, sick and in prison and you did not visit *Me*.’ 44 “Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see *You* hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to *You*?’ 45 Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to *Me*.’ 46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Notice the direct connection Jesus is making between being righteous and considering the poor. And, take serious notice of the fact that Jesus identifies with the poor, the helpless, the weak, the hungry, the ill, and the imprisoned.

Consider this from

1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?
18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

In other words, let us not just take note of the poor, the helpless, the weak, let us do something for them *because God cares*. You have to keep adding that motive. We care for the poor, the weak, the oppressed, the trafficked, the used and abused, *because God does*. There are all kinds of other motives for doing good, for helping people, but this is the one that really matters.

1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

Or, as we have said so often around here, we receive, and then we reflect. We receive mercy from God and then reflect it to others.

This is exactly what is happening back in Psalm 41. David has been through a time when he was ill, when people turned their back on him, when he was isolated and betrayed. But God showed up and protected him, gave him strength, comforted and healed him. And so now he understands, *if God’s heart is toward the weak and the vulnerable*, then there is a blessing for those who consider people in that condition, because *they are in tune with God’s concerns*. They are aligned with God’s priorities. There is a blessing for those who consider the poor, the weak, the helpless, because *they are mirroring the heart of God*.

Ps 41:1 ... The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.
2 The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive,
And he will be blessed on the earth;
You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.

God's intent is to deliver people out of trouble, to preserve them and keep them alive, to deliver them from the will of their enemies and He often wants to use other people to do that. So, God commands those who love Him to care about the widow, and the weak, and the addicted, and the impoverished, and the imprisoned, and those being unjustly oppressed and those suffering from lifelong illnesses and debilitating injuries.

Which means, God is going to lead some of you into fields of law, and medicine, and advocacy and counseling and coaching and foster care and adoption and on and on, God is going to call you to take up a profession *in which you can help people*. In which you can reduce suffering or pain, in which you can alleviate the effects of poverty, *out of love for Him* as you consider their condition and what your Father might want to use you to do about it.

But, remember, you're only able to reflect because you first received. In the eyes of God we are all poor. We are all broken. We are all in need of help. Those who hold to a progressive political view often say the problem is out there – all those mean people, all the people who have traditionally held power, all the people who built and sustain the systems that cause injustice and oppression, they're the problem and if we could just get rid of them, or just dismantle what they've built, everything would be better. But they often don't stop to recognize the oppressive tendencies in their own heart.

History has shown us time and time again that when formerly oppressed groups gain acceptance and power they often tend to become oppressive themselves because the problem is not in your culture or your skin color or your gender, it's in your heart, in your soul, and we're all vulnerable to the temptation to make systems and regulations that give us, and the people we like, preferential treatment and status.

Meanwhile, conservatives tend to think we've written our own success story through holding onto our moral code, behaving ourselves, working and studying hard and the same path is open to anyone who wants to follow, if they would just get their act together. But if I believe that, my tendency is to be stingy, to hold on to my time and money because it's mine and I've earned it. We overlook grace in favor of grit.

Both sides offer us consider things from God's perspective. There is prejudice and injustice in the world, there is oppression, but only God can save us from it, and He will. He may want to use you to fight against it, but you can only do that if you rely on Him to keep you from becoming the kind of person who would be oppressive towards others when you come into power yourself.

And, people do need to exercise personal responsibility and restraint, but they need to do it by leaning into God for strength, relying on Him for guidance, receiving grace from Him when they fail, and reflecting to others the mercy they have received.

Psalm 41 reminds us that God is near to the poor and the weak, even when they're rejected by others. Health, wealth, freedom, and power, often lead us away from God and can be toxic for our souls, tools we're often not strong enough to wield. But desperation fuels connection with Him.

If you feel weak, needy, powerless, vulnerable, afraid, ganged up on, gossiped about, left out, you need to know that God is with you. Invite Him in. Talk to Him about your needs. Ask Him for help and strength. Ask Him for comfort and encouragement. He wants to navigate your challenges with you and He wants to send people your way to help. Be open to receive it. Don't let pride get in your way. We are meant to be dependent on God and on each other.

God's perfect design is for each of us to *have* needs and *meet* needs, for each of us to experience weakness and offer strength. So, look around, consider the poor. Who are the people that you could help, and what could you do, by God's grace and with His strength, to make a difference in the life of someone else? What gifts has He given you, spiritual gifts, or material wealth that He has entrusted to you, professional skills or hobbies or abilities, how could they be used to glorify Him by meeting someone else's need? How could you reflect the heart of God by considering the needs around you and then getting involved?

And what kind of blessing might that bring as you mirror the heart of God? Let me give you a few opportunities to consider outside of your own circle of family and friends.

A few weeks ago you met Rachel and Argaw Ayele, missionaries we support in Ethiopia where they run several homes for children and at risk mothers. We also support Bill and Marcella Jasan who are doing work down in Haiti with local churches and also providing educational opportunities for local children by running schools in those churches mid-week. When you give to the church, it helps to support their ministries and others. But you could also give to them directly, either your time or your money as God compels you to give.

We also support several ministries here locally including Assist Crisis Pregnancy Center. They have opportunities for you to serve in their office with administration and they're always looking for those with medical training and certifications from doctors to nurses to sonogram technicians. They're also looking for men and women that are willing to come alongside other families as counselors.

We support Vic and Suebee Ransom financially as the Chaplain and Administrative Assistant down at the Fairfax Adult Detention center where they oversee all religious programs, but we also have people who serve by leading Bible Studies for the inmates, teaching work skills, and helping after inmates are released.

Historically we have had good connections with the Central Union Mission downtown and the Lamb Center locally which help the region's homeless population, we have the opportunities to teach Bible Studies in both locations as well as provide material support.

For many years we have collected shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child and recently we've had the opportunity to staff their regional collection center and prepare boxes for shipment.

Here in our own church we have funds in the budget to help people within our own congregation through our benevolence fund.

We've also run a meals ministry to help families that have just had a baby or major surgery and need some extra help getting through the recovery phase, particularly if you don't have family in the area.

And right now we have a couple of pregnant ladies that are going to need some meals soon. We've also got a family that is going through some major medical issues with both mom and one of the kids. So there will be several opportunities to serve in practical ways in the coming weeks.

If you're interested in helping out with the meals ministry, or anything else for that matter, please leave your contact info at the welcome table or email the office and we'll have someone get in touch with you.

There's nothing wrong with being in need. Remember, David was king when he became ill and needed the help of others. They disappointed him but he was reassured by God. Which helped him to see, when you consider the poor, the weak, those in need of any kind, you're mirroring the heart of God.

We're all poor in spirit, and all of our good deeds are meaningless in the sight of God if done for the wrong reason. But, if we learn to care about the people and things God cares about, there is a blessing to be found.

Ps 41:1 Blessed is he who considers the poor

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

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Summary: The joyful life involves knowing that God cares for the poor and weak and modeling it yourself.

- How do you define poverty? What does it mean to be poor?
- Do you tend to see poverty and suffering as more of a social problem or personal consequence? Does it come on you from the outside, or because you're not working hard enough and living the right way?
 - In what ways might someone who sees things from the other side be right about their view?
- What connection do you see between the blessing promised to those who consider the poor in vs 1 and the rest of the Psalm which describes physical ailments?
- What do you learn about the feeling of poverty from these verses?
 - Proverbs 10:15; 19:4
- What do the following verses teach us about God's view of the poor and weak?
 - Psalm 146:9
 - Proverbs 15:25; 23:10-11
 - Isaiah 1:17
 - 2 Cor 12:7-9
- How does the gospel meet the root needs of those who are poor and weak?
- Read the following verses and consider, what does God have to say about generosity?
 - Proverbs 11:24-26
 - Luke 6:38
 - 2 Corinthians 9:6-8
 - Matthew 5:7
 - Luke 12:22-34
- Additional recommended resources:
 - When Helping Hurts by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert
 - Radical by David Platt
 - Ministries of Mercy by Tim Keller