

## Unit I: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors

# Giving Generously

DEVOTIONAL READING: Exodus 20:12-17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Deuteronomy 15:1-11; Matthew 25:31-46;  
Luke 10:25-37; James 1:27; 2:14-17

PRINT PASSAGES: Deuteronomy 15:4-11; Matthew 25:42-45

### KEY VERSE

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, KJV)

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There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land. (Deuteronomy 15:11, NIV)

### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Compare God's definition of economic justice with that of a twenty-first-century Western perspective.
- Discover the joy of giving selflessly, without expecting anything in return.
- Develop and implement a strategy to address a specific injustice within your community.

### \*Key Terms

**Bless** (Deuteronomy 15:4)—Hebrew: *barak* (baw-rak'): to bestow with favor.

**Clothe(d)** (Matthew 25:43)—Greek: *periballó* (per-ee-bal'-lo): (did) throw around; to (have) put on; (did) wrap a garment about.

**Heart** (Deuteronomy 15:10)—Hebrew: *lebab* (lay-bawb'): inner man; mind; will.

**Inheritance** (Deuteronomy 15:4)—Hebrew: *nachalah* (nakh-al-aw'): possession; property; legacy.

**Obey** (Deuteronomy 15:5, NIV)—Hebrew: *shama* (shaw-mah'): to hear attentively; to listen and respond.

**Observe** (Deuteronomy 15:5, KJV)—Hebrew: *šāmar* (shaw-mar'): to keep, guard, give heed.

\*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



## The Biblical Context

The book of Deuteronomy reaffirms the Law given by Moses. As the Israelites traveled through the wilderness, they learned how to live together as a community. These lessons prepared them for life in the Promised Land. The commands were not optional suggestions but divine mandates for covenant living. Through a series of signs and wonders, God poured out blessings on His people, delivering them from slavery, through the wilderness, to the land He had promised their ancestors. God's design was that His people would remember their history and share His blessings, since all possessions belong to Him.

Jesus, as the new Moses and new lawgiver, continued this call to generosity. But He tied it directly to Himself. The idea that the Creator of all identified with the poor was striking. A messianic King might be expected to have everything at His command, yet Jesus showed that poverty does not separate one from God. What separates is the refusal to care for sisters and brothers in need.

## Introduction

One of the most progressive Christian voices of our day is that of the Rev. William Barber II. Rev. Barber leads the movement Repairers of the Breach and serves as director of the Center for Public Theology and Public Policy at Yale Divinity School. One of his most important roles is co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. His platform challenges a wealthy nation to open its coffers to its poorest citizens. This effort builds upon the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who launched the Poor People's Campaign in the 1960s, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who further advanced the cause through Operation Breadbasket and Operation PUSH. The movement remains significant both practically and theologically. Above all, it highlights the moral crisis of poverty across the country.

Economic injustice is not new—it is as old as humanity itself. Both the Old and New Testaments call God's people to generosity. Today's lesson guides believers in understanding this call.

### ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

## Easing the Burden of Poverty Should Be a Human Endeavor (Deuteronomy 15:4-6)

### KJV

**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.**

## **NIV**

**4** However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you,

**5** if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.

**6** For the LORD your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.

Some assume poverty is inevitable and best left for God to solve. Yet, Scripture places the responsibility for easing poverty on the covenant community itself. God blesses His people with abundance so that no one needs to suffer lack. Tithes ensured that the house of God, its workers, and the poor were cared for. Jesus affirmed this principle, reminding His disciples, “the poor you have with you always” (John 12:8, NKJV). This was not an excuse for neglect but a mandate to be continually attentive. Poverty is not tied in this passage to laziness, race, or personal failure. Instead, it is a human reality requiring a compassionate response. Some argue that anyone who is unwilling to work shall not eat (see 2 Thessalonians 3:10). But not all lack stems from refusal. Illness, hardship, and circumstance often prevent individuals from working. God commands His people to meet need without judgment.

## **Q WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**Why does Scripture insist that communities, not just individuals, bear responsibility for the poor?**

## **Generosity Makes Room for More** (*Deuteronomy 15:7-11*)

### **KJV**

**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 putteth 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.

## **NIV**

**7** If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them.

**8** Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.

**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 the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin.

**10** Give generously to them 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 fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

God’s law commanded not only caring for others but also showing cheerful generosity. Israel’s history demonstrated that God’s people thrived when they practiced openhanded giving. Jacob’s descendants entered Egypt during a famine but later departed with riches. In the wilderness, they received manna with instructions not to hoard. In Canaan, the law of debt releases every seventh year required trust in God’s provision. Though lenders feared loss, obedience promised blessing. God’s logic is simple: generosity makes room for more. This principle is echoed in Proverbs 11:25a: “The liberal soul shall be made fat.” Jesus confirmed it: “Give, and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38a). Doris Akers expressed the same in song: “You can’t beat God giving, no matter how you try” (“You Can’t Beat God Giving,” Doris Akers © 1958 by Manna Music, Inc.). Hoarding leads to emptiness, but generosity multiplies blessings for both the giver and receiver.

## **🔍 WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**Have you experienced generosity, yours or another’s—producing an unexpected blessing?**

## **When You Ignored the Least of These You Ignored Christ (Matthew 25:42-45)**

### **KJV**

**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.

## NIV

42 “For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

43 “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.’

44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

45 “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”

Jesus identifies Himself with the poor and marginalized. To neglect them is to neglect Him. This is startling because God owns all: “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof” (Psalm 24:1a). Yet, He locates Himself in the faces of the hungry, the naked, the stranger, and the imprisoned. Prosperity is not always proof of divine favor, nor is poverty evidence of divine absence.

Luke 6:20 records Jesus’ declaring simply that blessed are those who are poor. Giving to the least of these is giving to Christ Himself: “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD” (Proverbs 19:17, NIV). Ignoring them is rejecting His presence. This passage calls believers to radical solidarity with the needy, recognizing that God measures devotion not by ritual alone but by compassion in action.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How might your response to the poor change if you truly saw Christ in them?

## A Closing Thought

This lesson reminds us that giving is at the heart of Christian living. It is not just a ritual in worship but is grounded in biblical principles. Giving allows believers and churches to tithe faithfully, fight poverty, honor God, and provide for others. Generosity blesses not only the receiver but also the giver. Divine reciprocity flows from faithful giving.

## Your Life

Like many people, you may have assumed that you can only make a difference with your giving when you reach a state of abundance or wealth. Yet, giving to religious causes remains the largest category for giving in America. Giving to the church and other religious causes is significant because even the smallest or most modest gift can have a long and lasting impact.

## Your World!

Some recent government policies aim to eliminate what is known as “wasteful spending.” However, such cuts often reduce aid to those who need it most. Commit yourself to remaining prayerful and sensitive to the unspoken needs of others. God will give you the resources if

