

Helping Neighbors in Need

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

Focus Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:4-11; Matthew 25:42-45

Key Verse: "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.'" Deuteronomy 15:11

DEUTERONOMY 15:4-11; MATTHEW 25:42-45
(NRSV UE)

Deuteronomy 15:4-11

4 "There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy,

5 if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today.

6 When the Lord your God has blessed you, as he promised you, you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.

7 If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor.

8 You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.

9 Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,' and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt.

10 Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

11 Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you,

DEUTERONOMY 15:4-11; MATTHEW 25:42-45
(KJV)

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.

‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.’”

Matthew 25:42-45

42 “...for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

44 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?’

45 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.’”

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.

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.

KEY TERMS

- **Deuteronomy** – The fifth book of the Old Testament; from the Greek translation, it means “the Second law.”
- **Economy** – Refers to the systems through which goods and services are produced, distributed, and consumed to meet the needs and wants of people living and working within a specific geographic area.

INTRODUCTION

News reports and credible data on wealth and poverty in the United States reveal deep and growing disparities

among the people. A small percentage of the population holds most of the wealth, while millions struggle with basic needs such as housing, health-care, and education. These gaps raise serious questions about justice, policy, and equal access to opportunity.

Aligned with our theme, “Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors,” today’s lesson challenges believers to move beyond the stages of awareness to act. Deuteronomy 15:4-11 and Matthew 25:42 offer a clear view of God’s economy.

This economy differs as it is rooted in justice, mercy, policy priorities, and community care,

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rather than the pursuit of wealth and power.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

As our story in Deuteronomy begins, the Israelites are on the plains of Moab, across from Jericho, preparing for their second attempt to enter the promised land. After 40 years of wandering due to rebellion and lack of faith, a new generation is ready to cross into Canaan. Since Moses is not permitted to enter, he delivers final instructions on how to live according to God's will. Deuteronomy 15:4-11 reveals God's economy, centered on justice, generosity, and shared responsibility.

Poverty Is Non-Existent – Deuteronomy 15:4-6

Moses explains that, in God's economy, no one should be in need. God will richly bless them, provided Israel obeys him "by diligently observing this entire commandment." His blessings are contingent only upon obedience to God's laws, including the care of one another.

Notably, God's blessings include empowerment to bless others by being lenders instead of being borrowers generously. In essence, God's people are not to be hoarders! Instead, they are to be conduits for sharing God's blessings with others, particularly those who are in need and not likely to be able to repay favors.

God's System Offers Relief – Deuteronomy

15:7-10

Reparations are inherent in God's system. Every seven years, debts were to be forgiven, thereby creating relief from indebtedness and new opportunities for economic growth and movement. Intergenerational debt cycles and life-long poverty are non-existent in this system. Selfishness is not acceptable! There is no need or excuse for greed. Generosity is like a golden thread that describes and binds God's economy. In the New Testament scriptures below, Jesus' teachings link Moses' teachings to the final judgment.



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Punishment for Violators – Matthew 25:42-45

In this prophetic teaching, Jesus reigns as the king during the second coming. He will judge all nations and separate the people "one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25:31-32). Jesus describes the final judgment and explains that, as the judge, he will condemn some people. Jesus also cites specific actions

against him that will be the basis for judgment: "not feeding the hungry, not giving drink, not welcoming strangers, not clothing the naked, and not visiting the sick or imprisoned." Unsurprisingly, those condemned will ask when they have seen Jesus in need and not responded with compassion. Jesus emphasizes that neglecting the needs of the vulnerable is equivalent to ignoring him (Matt. 25:42-45). These scriptures

serve as both warnings and blessings, helping us understand how God's principles relate to kingdom living and our salvation.

SANKOFA

Reparations are not a new idea! In Leviticus 25, the Year of Jubilee brought about social and economic fairness every 50 years – liberating the enslaved, canceling debts, and restoring land ownership. Similarly, when the Israelites left Egypt, they received silver and clothing from the Egyptians because of God's favor (Exodus 12:35-36). These same biblical principles shape today's call for reparations for descendants of the African diaspora. While the United States has provided reparations to some groups for human rights abuses, Africans have largely been excluded. Resources like "The Case for Reparations" by Ta-Nehisi Coates offer valuable insights.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church supports the reparations movement. In August 2024, our church passed a resolution, written by Rev. Dr. Robert Turner, at its 52nd General Conference, affirming this commitment. The resolution also urges the AME Social Action Commission to prioritize reparations over the next four years. This is a clear call to recognize reparations as a biblically based

concept. Understanding God's plan for economic justice – and our church's stance on social justice – requires more than just awareness. It demands action. So, how will you engage?

CASE STUDY

NBA Hall of Famer David Robinson and his wife, Valerie, demonstrate wealth-sharing aligned with God's purposes. In 2001, they founded The Carver Academy to offer quality education for underserved students in East San

Antonio. What started as a private PK–8 school has grown into a tuition-free charter school under the IDEA, now a network with campuses across Texas. Robinson has contributed more than money; he remains actively involved and serves on IDEA's board.

Along with donating \$9 million to Carver, the Robinsons also provided \$2,000 college scholarships to every fifth grader at Gates Elementary who graduated high school, lat-

er increasing it to \$8,000. This is by no means an exhaustive list of their generosity, but the scripture "to whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48) must resonate with the Robinsons – as it should with all disciples.

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LIFE APPLICATION

Poverty, as referenced in Matthew 26:11 and John 12:8, remains a persistent reality – but its inevitability does not justify ignoring the poor. Deuteronomy 15:4-11 urges God’s people to be generous with each other, especially during the sabbatical year, when debts were forgiven. This passage reminds us to use our blessings to aid others, stay humble, and dedicate all we have to God. Sadly, today’s poor are often dehumanized and blamed for their difficulties. Yet Matthew 25:42-45 makes it clear: how we treat the vulnerable reflects how we treat Jesus himself. We must recognize the humanity and the image of God in every person.

Our concern must also extend beyond personal charity to include advocating against systemic injustices such as unfair wealth distribution, tax systems, immigration policies, and other issues covered in this lesson. Awareness is just the beginning; believers are called to act. We must speak out, share our resources, and work to dismantle systems that prevent people from thriving and contributing to the well-being of others.

Questions:

1. What are your thoughts about the enforcement of current immigration laws in this country?
2. Using this lesson as a contextual lens, how much and what actions do you feel should be taken to ensure that we empower others and not enable dependency?
3. How comfortable are you with whether you are exemplifying God’s call to be a conduit for his blessing?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: “More About Jesus Would I Know,” *AME Hymnal* #21

Closing Prayer: Father God, in the name of Jesus, we bow in deepest humility before you, and we praise you because of who you are! Thank you for teaching me how to live in ways that please you. We want to serve and please you, Lord. So, please forgive our sins and transgressions, and continue to bless us with a desire to study and learn more about Jesus, knowing that as we do, we will be increasingly empowered to love and obey you. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 16-22

Monday	1 Samuel 18:1-5 (Souls Bound Together)
Tuesday	1 John 4:7-16 (Abide in God’s Love)
Wednesday	1 John 4:17-21 (Loving God and Each Other)
Thursday	Isaiah 56:3-8 (All Peoples Will Worship God)
Friday	Psalms 133–134 (Living Together in Unity)
Saturday	Galatians 3:25-29 (Children of God Through Faith)
Sunday	Acts 10:9-15, 30-35 (God Accepts Us All)