

# Helping Hands

(by Pastor Trent Boedicker)

Text: Proverbs 14:21, 31

1/31/16

*He who despises his neighbor sins,  
But happy is he who is gracious to the poor...  
He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker,  
But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.*

A young woman was in the check-out lane, at the grocery store with her two small children. They couldn't have been more than a few years old, and were doing a good job of being patient, while their mommy placed the groceries onto the conveyer belt: a box of cereal, a gallon of milk, eggs, bread, and a few other staples.

Nervously, she watched the total on the screen add up as the cashier scanned each item. She was pretty sure she had just enough to cover everything. It would be embarrassing to have to ask the cashier to put something back. That didn't happen very often. She was always careful to keep track of how much she had to spend, and what she put in her cart. But there were times when it was close. Reaching into her purse, she pulled out some dollar bills and a handful of loose change, along with her food stamp card. Seeing the final total, she breathed a sigh of relief. There was enough, and almost a dollar to spare.

Handing the payment to the cashier, the young mother couldn't help but overhear the conversation of the people behind her. They weren't making much of an effort to keep their voices down, and their loud complaining was hard to miss. One of the ladies told her friend, "This is ridiculous! We shouldn't have to stand in the checkout line waiting so long."

"You're right," her friend chimed in, "It's because of all of these lazy people who use food stamps. People like her, they don't do any work, and expect the rest of us to take care of them. Look at that welfare queen. She probably had those babies to get more money. That's what they do, you know." The other lady shook her head in agreement, both of them shooting dirty looks in the direction of the young women.

The mother tried her best to ignore them. All she wanted to do was get her groceries and get out of there, as quickly as she could. But finally, she had enough. Turning around, she shouted, "Look, I am not lazy. I work two jobs, so I can pay the rent and put food on the table. I love my kids, and I would do almost anything to take care of them. I didn't have them so I could get more food stamps. My husband left us, and now I've got to do it all on my own. I can't wait until I get a better job, so I don't have to use this card anymore. In the meantime, I wish that people like you would keep your comments to yourself!" With that, the mother stormed out of the grocery store, leaving the two women stunned.

Scripture has a lot to say about our attitude towards the poor. There are a lot of people, all around us, who are struggling to get by, who may not know where the next meal is going to

come from, and who don't have a support system to lean on when they find themselves in a tough spot. These people need sympathy, not condemnation

It's true, there are some who know how to work the system, who get where they are by making a series of bad decisions, and then expect others to bail them out. We talked about that last week, when looked at the value of hard work. But not everyone who struggles to get by is there through some fault of their own. Any of us can fall on hard times. Adversity just has a way of finding some people: A man loses his job when the factory where he has worked for 20 years suddenly closes down. A medical emergency drains a family's bank account and the hospital bills keep coming. A woman's car breaks down, and she doesn't have the budget for a new one. There's a hundred other scenarios just like these. It's easy to make excuses, and not get involved, or to be so busy with our own lives that we don't even notice them. But the Lord wants us to have open hands, not closed hearts.

## **Christians should show compassion to those in need, because God cares about the poor.**

Solomon spends a lot of time, in the book of Proverbs, encouraging God's people to extend a helping hand to those in need. He realized that when a society is made up of people who care only about themselves, that nation will crumble. But when men and women look out for each other, showing special concern for those who are struggling, the result will be a strong and flourishing community.

### **1. Proverbs teaches us, first of all, that should show compassion to those in need because **it is wrong to ignore the afflictions of others.****

Again, **Proverbs 14:21** tells us, "*He who despises His neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor.*" Turning someone away emptyhanded, when I am in a position to help, isn't right. I can't, in good conscience, turn a blind eye to a neighbor who is struggling. I can tell myself, "Well, that's too bad, but it's not my problem." One commentator says, "In this line the neighbor is assumed to be poor or at least in need. Despising [him] means treating with contempt, discarding [him] as worthless. To ignore a neighbor in this cold-hearted fashion is just as much a sin as showing favor to the poor is an act of righteousness." (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*)

"Wait a minute," someone argues "it's not my fault they are in that situation, I didn't do anything to cause them harm." Maybe not, but did you do anything to help?

Sometime we talk about two kinds of sin - sins of commission and sins of omission. When I do something that I know I shouldn't do, that is an offense to God. But it is equally offensive, when I know the good I ought to do, and I refuse to do it.

Loving my neighbor isn't something that is optional for a child of God; it is who we're called to be. When I look down on my neighbor, and show contempt for him in his time of need, the

love of Christ is not being displayed through my life. God's heart breaks for the downtrodden and afflicted, ours should be breaking too.

In the OT, the Law of Moses made provisions to protect the poor and to provide for their need. When the farmers of Israel harvested crops, the Lord commanded them to leave the edges of the field unpicked. That's not what a person would normally do. Most farmers in the ancient world (and today) would be inclined to bring in every last stalk of grain, to maximize their profit. But the people of Israel were supposed to leave some of it behind, so that the poor would always be able to find something to eat. (the OT equivalent of a food pantry) When a person didn't have anywhere else to go, there was always somewhere they could turn, so they would not go hungry. God commanded the people of Israel, in **Leviticus 19:9-10**:

*When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.*

That's what was happening in the book of Ruth. Naomi and Ruth were widows, who had nothing: no money, no income, no one to look after them or to make sure their needs were met. And so Ruth went out to gather crops from one of the fields nearby. It happened to belong to a godly man named Boaz. When Boaz saw her, he told his workers not to give her a hard time, and not to chase her away. Not only was he displaying kindness towards these needy women, but he was also obeying the commands of God.

In another place, the Lord instructed the children of Israel,

*If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)*

If Israel had obeyed God there wouldn't have been many poor or needy people in the land. Everyone would have what they needed to survive. Sadly, far too often, the people disregarded these commands, and only looked out for themselves.

God does not despise the poor. In **Psalms 102:17** we are told, "*He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea.*"

Israel's Laws may not apply in quite the same way today, in this dispensation. But believers are still called to love our neighbor as ourselves. Hold your place, in Proverbs, and turn with me to the NT, to 1 John 3:16-18. // John has a lot to say about love, throughout the letter, and he tells us that genuine love is something that is lived out... it is expressed in real and tangible ways... not just with our words, but through our actions. That was the case for God's love. // **1 John 3:16-18** tells us:

*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his*

*heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.*

If we are looking for evidence of God's love toward us, all we have to do is look to the cross, where Christ poured out His life for us. He gave everything, to meet our deepest spiritual need. His love was gracious – we didn't do anything to deserve it. It was overflowing – He went above and beyond what anyone could have expected. His love was sacrificial – He gave all that he had, even His own life, not grudgingly, or reluctantly, but joyfully.

As those who have become the recipients of such great love, we are now called to show this kind of love to others. How can we ignore the needy people around us, when God didn't ignore our need? If I see a brother in need, and have the ability to help him, but I close my heart, where is God's love?

Imagine if you hit a patch of ice, while driving, and spun off the road. The car won't move, it's totaled. You are able to climb out of the driver seat, but there is a gash on your head, and you are bleeding. You wave for someone to stop. But everyone keeps right on going. In fact, some of the cars seem to speed up. None of the other motorists even look your way. An ambulance goes by, and you are sure that you're finally going to get some help, but it doesn't stop. A police car comes along, but he doesn't even check to see if you're okay. How would you feel? There are a lot of people in this world who feel that way right now. They are wondering when someone will ask if they're okay; they're wondering when someone will reach out to help.

We may not be able to meet every need, but we can do something. We can at least show kindness and concern for hurting people that God brings into our life. We can at least let them know that someone cares, and offer to pray with them. Even if we don't have anything else to give, we can at least give our sympathy.

## **2. Proverbs also teaches us that we should show compassion to those in need because **we are blessed when we reach out to help others.****

Turn to **Proverbs 22:9**. *“He who is generous will be blessed, For he gives some of his food to the poor.”*

When God uses us in some way to make a difference the life of another person, we almost always end up being blessed in the process.

A number of years ago our congregation partnered with other area churches and service groups to help needy families in our community at Christmas time with food baskets and gifts. We stacked up all of the chairs in the sanctuary, and people brought in donations, until the room was full. And then we spent a few hours, on a Saturday morning, meeting people at the door, and helping them load packages into their cars. At the end of the day, we were exhausted. Our muscles ached. Our feet were sore. But you know what? It was worth it. It felt so good to bring a smile to someone's face, especially when you knew they really appreciated it. We had a

chance to get to know some of the families, and hear the struggles that they were going through, and to know that we had helped make the holidays just a little brighter, warmed our hearts.

To a lot of people, that doesn't make any sense. Why share food from your own cupboards with someone you barely know? Why spend money on a complete stranger knowing, that in all likelihood, it will never be repaid? If there is nothing in it for you, why go to all of that trouble? We do it because we enjoy being a part of God's work, and allowing Him to use us to change lives. That's what life is all about.

Maybe a person starts out with a bad attitude: "Uhg, I've got this service project this weekend. Why did I even sign up? I've got so many other things that I need to do. I wish I could skip out, but I don't want to do that." The guy shows up, and starts to help, and pretty soon God starts working in his heart. And he realizes that being there is more important than those other things. He starts to understand that it wasn't a day wasted, but a day invested in things of eternal significance. And he goes home, that night, filled with joy.

Turn to **Proverbs 19:17**. "*One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, And He will repay him for his good deed.*" That's an interesting phrase, we "lend to the Lord" when we help out a brother in need. Of course we understand that God doesn't need to borrow anything from anyone to accomplish good in this world. If Jesus could feed the five thousand with a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread, He can do anything. But He gives us the privilege of being a part of His work. When we willingly place our time, talents, and treasure in His hands, He will do something exciting.

The passage tells us that Lord will repay us for our good deed. Some people verses like this out of context and claim that God promises to bless us materially, when we live a good Christian life. "If you give \$5 to charity God will multiply that tenfold and you will receive back \$50 for your investment." – No, that's not what the passage is saying. But there is a reward for doing good. We go away encouraged, uplifted, excited to see God use us to touch lives. We know that our lives have counted for something, that we are a part of something bigger. We may get to see men and women come to faith as a result, and what greater reward could there be? One day we will get to hear our Savior will say "well done good and faithful servant"

In **1 Timothy 6:18-19** the apostle Paul writes, "*Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.*"

### **3. Finally, Proverbs teaches us that we should show compassion to those in need, because how we treat the poor is a reflection of our attitude towards God. when we help the poor we honor God.**

Go back to **Proverbs 14:31**. "*He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.*" There were a lot of rulers, in the ancient world, who enlarged their wealth by oppressing the poor. If they needed to raise revenue, for some building

project, all they had to do was raise taxes. It's not like the king could be voted out of office. If the king happened to like a piece of property, you owned. All he had to do was say the word, and make it his. The poor were an easy target. They had no voice, no power, and no one to defend their cause. It was like taking candy from a baby. But what these unjust kings failed to realize is that the Lord hears the cries of the poor, and those who oppress them will have to answer to Him.

God takes it personally when people trample the rights of the helpless and weak. That's not just a nameless face, to Him. It is someone that He deeply loves. The same God who gave you life, and brought you into this world, who knew everything there was to know about you from the beginning of time, is also their Creator too.

It doesn't matter if a person is rich or poor, if they belong to the upper level of society or the bottom rung. Each person is made in the image of God and therefore deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. And so when the poor are mistreated it is insult the Lord.

The flip side is also true. When we treat the poor with kindness... when help the hurting... when we minister to the brokenhearted, God is pleased. It is as if we are doing those things for Him.

If I was standing by the door after church, greeting people as they went out, and my kids were in the fellowship hall, and one of them tripped, and fell down and got hurt, and started crying. But you were right there, and helped them up, and made sure they were okay.... I would be so thankful. Even though you were helping them, you were also showing kindness to me as well, because that is my child.

In the NT, Christ teaches that kindness shown to others, in this life, will not be forgotten. Matthew 25:34–40

<sup>34</sup> *“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. <sup>35</sup> 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, <sup>36</sup> 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.’*

<sup>37</sup> *“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’*

<sup>40</sup> *“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.’*

## **Conclusion** –

(1) Pay attention to the people around you who are struggling to get by (neighbors, friends, family...) and ask “what can I do to help?” It may not seem like much, but little things can make

a big difference. We can prepare a meal, and take it over to their home. We can help with a few groceries every now and then: “Hey, the grocery store had a great sale on milk this week, and I bought an extra gallon, would your family be able to use it?” We can pray for them.

(2) Look for ways to serve those in need, in our community. Volunteer in the food pantry. When the Boy Scouts do their annual food drive, put a bag of canned goods out on the doorknob. Help serve meals at ReStore. Offer to drive an elderly person to the doctor through Love INC. Spend time teaching life skills to young pregnant women, through Heartbeat. Donate an old coat to the homeless, through the Rescue Mission. There are so many ministries and outreaches and charitable organizations in our area. You can’t be involved with all of them, but maybe God is putting one of them on your heart.

(3) Watch your attitude towards the poor. Don’t just assume someone is lazy because they are struggling. There are a lot of people out there who are using the system. I’ve encountered many of them, as a pastor. I hear all kinds of stories. Some of them I know aren’t true. Some of them I highly suspect are not true. It is easy to develop a cold heart and automatically turn people away. But that’s not the kind of spirit God wants us to have to the poor.

(4) Ask God for wisdom, in helping others. There are times when it is better to say no, when giving someone what they ask for actually enables them to continue a destructive lifestyle (especially when substance abuse is the cause of their problem).