

## SESSION 2

# READY TO HELP THE POOR

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### *The Point*

We are to imitate God in our desire to help the poor.

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### *The Bible Meets Life*

So many of us can be thankful for our homes, possessions, and comfortable lifestyles. Others among us just barely get by. We often struggle in situations that confront us with the underprivileged. It's often easier to look the other way when we cross paths with someone who is homeless or poor, but God calls us to help people who may be different than us, showing them His love for them.

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### *The Passage*

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## **Deuteronomy 15:7-11**

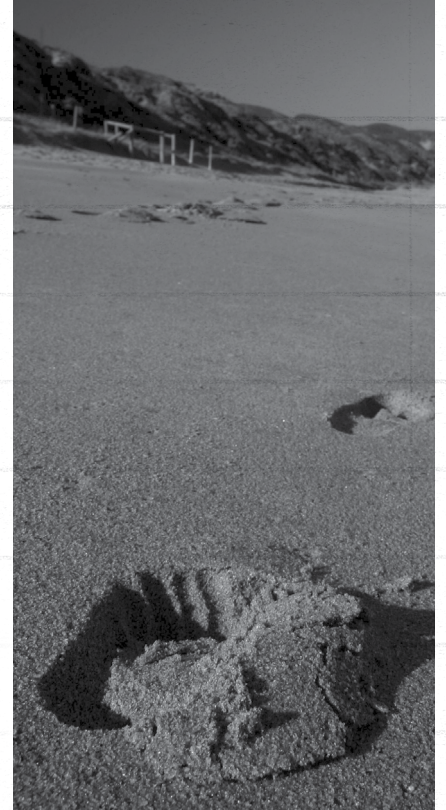
<sup>7</sup> "If there is a poor person among you, one of your brothers within any of your gates in the land the LORD your God is giving you, you must not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother.

<sup>8</sup> Instead, you are to open your hand to him and freely loan him enough for whatever need he has.

<sup>9</sup> Be careful that there isn't this wicked thought in your heart, 'The seventh year, the year of canceling debts, is near,' and you are stingy toward your poor brother and give him nothing. He will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty.

<sup>10</sup> Give to him, and don't have a stingy heart when you give, and because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you do.

<sup>11</sup> For there will never cease to be poor people in the land; that is why I am commanding you, 'You must willingly open your hand to your afflicted and poor brother in your land.'



## THE SETTING

Frightened by the report of giants in the land of Canaan, God's people chose to remain in the wilderness rather than enter the promised land intended for them. The wandering years had now passed, and Moses' tenure leading the people was about to expire. But prior to his exiting the scene, Moses reviewed for the people all the instructions the Lord had thus far given them.

# ENGAGE

(15 MINUTES)



ITEM  
10

**Leader Pack:** Use the *World Poverty* poster as an **Engage Option** to help introduce the session.

## GET INTO THE STUDY

**ENGAGE:** Begin the session with one or more of the **Engage Options** on the next page. (This is optional. If you'd rather skip the **Engage Options**, just begin with the first discussion question.)

**SAY:** It's easy to look the other way when we cross paths with someone who is homeless or poor, but God calls us to help people who may be different than us, showing them His love for them.

**DISCUSS:** Invite students to discuss the question, "What comes to mind when you see someone who is poor?"

**GUIDE:** Call attention to **The Point**. Explain that this is the key idea to keep in mind throughout the session.

THE POINT

*We are to imitate God in our desire to help the poor.*

**READ:** Read and summarize **The Bible Meets Life** for your group.

I had become so used to seeing them that I learned not to notice them. And I know I'm not alone. My blind spot? I don't see the poor. To be fair, this can be attributed partly to the city where I live. We have one of the highest homeless populations in our country. But I discovered the issue went deeper for me. Several years ago I realized that I unconsciously had been reading the Bible with blinders on wherever it deals with topics concerning the poor. Somehow I had skipped right over the many passages that deal with the poor. I've always given my tithe to my local church, and I have been on a journey for the last 25 years to give proportionally far above that. I felt like I was doing great until I was challenged to read the Bible with fresh eyes and look for all the commands and references to the poor, the orphan, and the widow. Somewhere along the line my heart had become insensitive, and giving a few dollars to individuals or through my church became a substitute for my heart's being generous. In the words of Deuteronomy 15, I was being hardhearted and tightfisted, shutting my hand and heart to those who needed both from me. But this passage in Deuteronomy also shows me the other side: the blessing of being generous to those in need. Let's consider how we can help others in need, and in the process, demonstrate the very heart of God.

**PRAY:** Transition into the session by praying for students to focus on God's call to help people in need.

# Engage Options

## ► Lead with Action

Prior to the session, collect essential items that people need to survive in life. Place them at the front of the room. To begin, enlist five volunteers to come to the front. Give each student a backpack of the same size. Challenge students to see who can fit the most in their backpacks. Say, **“What if this was all that you owned? You could not have anything else even if you found it because you have nowhere to keep it. Imagine there was no washing machine to wash and dry the clothes. This was it.”**

## ► Lead with Atmosphere

Turn out the lights for less than a minute without warning the students. Leave the lights off just long enough for the students to become alarmed. Say, **“Every night, homeless people go to bed in complete darkness with no shelter to protect them. We often bypass the poor without taking any time to realize what they are going through or what their lives looks like.”**

## ► Lead with Media

The movie *Pursuit of Happyness* tells the true story of Chris Gardner. Chris had a difficult life and ended up homeless with his toddler son at one point. Show a clip from the movie in which Chris and his son spend the night in the train station bathroom. (There are many moments you can use in this movie to convey your point.) Say, **“We tend to picture the poor and homeless differently than we view ourselves. We don’t put ourselves in their shoes because we think something must be wrong with them. The truth is that we are only a few decisions or mistakes away from being them. Chris Gardner invested money into a bad product and ended up homeless. God has called us to reach out to those in need because He cares about them as much as He cares about us.”**

ITEM  
10

**OPTION:** Use the *World Poverty poster* as an engage option. Ask your students about the statistics globally and in the United States. Then (after some research on your own) fill in the blanks for your community. Ask your students if they were surprised how close poverty is to them. Are they surprised by these statistics?

**OPTION:** Play the song “Follow You” by Leeland. Say, “Are you ready and willing to follow Him into the homes of the broken?”

## STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point: We are to imitate God in our desire to help the poor.*

<sup>7</sup> “If there is a poor person among you, one of your brothers within any of your gates in the land the LORD your God is giving you, you must not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. <sup>8</sup> Instead, you are to open your hand to him and freely loan him enough for whatever need he has. <sup>9</sup> Be careful that there isn’t this wicked thought in your heart, ‘The seventh year, the year of canceling debts, is near,’ and you are stingy toward your poor brother and give him nothing. He will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty.

—DEUTERONOMY 15:7-9—

### DEUTERONOMY 15:7-9

**SUMMARIZE:** Explain the two big issues that Moses addressed when it comes to generosity toward the poor.

The command in verses 7-8 is pretty straightforward. Moses pointed out the two big issues when it comes to generosity toward the poor.

► **Generosity is a heart issue.**

► **Generosity is a hand issue.**

The heart has everything to do with attitude, and the hand has everything to do with action. The heart is about belief, and the hand is about behavior.

Earlier in Deuteronomy 15, Moses introduced a new command related to the sabbatical year: every seven years the Israelites were to cancel all debts. Sometimes people view the Old Testament as a collection of harsh rules and stories, but Deuteronomy 15 is a great example of God’s grace, mercy, and kindness. If God’s people would obey His commands concerning lending and borrowing—including collecting, repaying, and forgiving debts—the Lord assured them that there wouldn’t be any “poor” among them.

Unfortunately, people often have trouble following God’s commands. Because God knew that, He gave a stern warning in verse 9: if they were stingy with their giving, they would be guilty of sin.

It might be easy for us to judge the Israelites and wonder: How could they be so uncaring toward their fellow people? But how many times do we make find excuses for not being generous toward the poor in our own communities?

**DISCUSS:** Challenge students to answer and discuss the question, “**What are some of the excuses we make for not being generous toward the poor?**”

# Commentary

## DEUTERONOMY 15:7-9

Rather than being hardhearted or tightfisted toward the poor, God instructed His people to open their hands and freely loan according to the need of the poor. The principle is stated in general terms and not intended to be a command to give people anything they ask for. The biblical work ethic does not support giving to people who can and should work to provide for themselves. The verb *loan* indicates a legal agreement to repay the resources provided by the borrower.

The Law was specific regarding loans to fellow Israelites. Charging interest for a loan was forbidden (Lev. 25:35-37); it was considered taking advantage of fellow Israelites' misfortune. The Law did allow Israelites to charge interest when loaning to foreigners (Deut. 23:20). A borrower was to produce a pledge or collateral for the loan, but there were restrictions on the lender. The debtor was allowed to go outside his home when the pledge was given to the lender in order not to humiliate him before family or others (24:10-11). The lender was not allowed to take something that would endanger the debtor's survival (v. 6; Ex. 22:26-27).

In all of these stipulations, the emphasis was on compassion and respect for the poor.

Verse 9 addresses a situation unique to the culture of Israel regarding specified years when debts were to be forgiven. The year of canceling debts was connected to a command regarding land use after Israel occupied the promised land. Every seven years Israelites were instructed not to work the land and allow it rest (Ex. 23:10-11). The beginning of the seventh year also became the time when outstanding debts were to be canceled. The closer to the seventh year, the less willing some Israelites were to lend to the poor, realizing they would likely not be repaid. The Lord warned against this stingy attitude (lit. "evil eye") toward the poor. In those cases, God warned that the poor could cry out to the Lord and stressed that the person who refused to help would be guilty before Him. No penalty is specified, but the command was intended to warn those who failed to help of a divine response.

God declared that failure to help the poor is an injustice that would bring divine punishment.

The warning against withholding help near the year of cancellation of debts meant that some lenders would not be repaid. This would turn a loan into a gift. This was not a reason to forbid helping the poor in a time of need. The person lending must be willing to suffer loss and by faith trust God to repay him.

**TIP:** Don't forget to tell students that generosity should always be more about obedience to God and helping others. What we personally get out of helping people should never be the driving force of our generosity.

## STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point: We are to imitate God in our desire to help the poor.*

<sup>10</sup> Give to him, and don't have a stingy heart when you give, and because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you do. <sup>11</sup> For there will never cease to be poor people in the land; that is why I am commanding you, 'You must willingly open your hand to your afflicted and poor brother in your land.'

—DEUTERONOMY 15:10-11

### DEUTERONOMY 15:10-11

**SUMMARIZE:** Explain how we should express generosity because of Christ's generosity toward us.

God didn't call Israel to do the bare minimum. He didn't tell them to just meet the need or give the least amount they can afford. He called the Israelites to a high standard of generosity. This principle should be even more tangible and powerful for us who follow Christ. We have personally experienced God's generosity toward us in the coming of Jesus; therefore, we should express generosity to others.

These truths are repeated throughout the Bible. For example, James 5:1-6 gives a strong warning to those who are rich (like many of us who are Americans). God is not opposed to wealth, but He is opposed to the misuse and abuse of wealth. That is why James exposed the shadow side of wealth and rebuked it. James also described critical ways we are to use our wealth.

**1. Don't hoard your money.** James warns against hoarding wealth, money, and clothes. This is about what you do with the wealth you have accumulated.

**2. Don't waste your money.** James reprimands those who have lived in luxury and self-indulgence. This is about how we spend the money we have. When we live indulgently, we are being excessive, wasteful, and self-gratifying.

**3. Be generous with your money.** The cure to hoarding and self-indulgent living is generosity. This is about how we use our resources to bless others and, thus, bring God's blessing into our lives.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, "How does this passage challenge us to make ministry to the poor more of a priority in our lives?"

**DO:** Direct students to complete the **Action Point**, "How Likely Is It?"

#### How Likely Is It?

On a scale from 1-10 (one being the lowest), how likely are you to:

Help someone who is homeless?

Go work at a soup kitchen?

Donate old clothes to someone else?

# Commentary

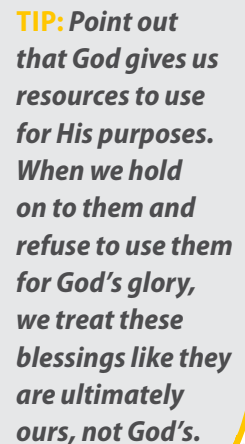
## DEUTERONOMY 15:10-11

With the imperative “give to him,” the Lord commanded abundance toward the poor. God promised blessings on generous givers’ work and in everything they did. A stingy heart would result in judgment, but a giving spirit resulted in God’s favor. The text does not specify what the blessings would be. They could consist of increases in crops or herds, business opportunities, or blessings for the individual or family. “You can’t out give God” is often used of stewardship through the local church, but it also applies to generosity toward the poor. God rewards the generous. There is no guarantee of material wealth for generous givers, but Jesus spoke of a greater treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:20).

Verse 11 begins with the sobering prediction that there will never cease to be poor people in the land. Some commentators believe this looks forward to times of disobedience by Israel when they would be reduced to poverty by acts of divine judgment. The statement seems broader than this, however, and appears to indicate a permanent class of poor. Jesus quoted this statement during an incident at the home of Simon the leper. A woman poured an expensive vial of perfume on Jesus’ head only to be rebuked by His disciples. They thought the gift a waste of money, suggesting it should have been sold and the money given to the poor (Matt. 26:6-9). Jesus rebuked them and said the gift was appreciated in anticipation of His death on the cross (v. 12). He told them that the poor would always be with them, but they wouldn’t always have Jesus with them (v. 11). Jesus indicated there would be many opportunities in the future to help those who are poor because poverty has always been and, by implication, always will be a component of fallen humanity.

Immediately following the statement that the poor would always be among them, God commanded the Israelites to willingly open their hands to the afflicted and poor brother in the land. We can be overwhelmed by the extent of poverty in our world. While we cannot meet every need, we can choose to respond with generosity and the love of Christ to meet some of those needs.

Sadly, the history of Israel demonstrates the sinfulness of each succeeding generation. Selfishness, greed, and cruelty resulted in a violation of God’s laws of love and compassion. Some Israelites not only failed to help the poor, but also took advantage of their predicament. Today, Christians live in a culture of greed and selfishness. We can distinguish ourselves as disciples of the greatest Giver of all time by helping those who are in need both materially and spiritually.



**TIP:** Point out that God gives us resources to use for His purposes. When we hold on to them and refuse to use them for God’s glory, we treat these blessings like they are ultimately ours, not God’s.

## STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point: We are to imitate God in our desire to help the poor.*

### DEUTERONOMY 15:7-11

<sup>7</sup> “If there is a poor person among you, one of your brothers within any of your gates in the land the LORD your God is giving you, you must not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. <sup>8</sup> Instead, you are to open your hand to him and freely loan him enough for whatever need he has.

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—DEUTERONOMY 15:7-11

**READ:** Enlist a student to read aloud the quote from Mother Teresa. Encourage your students to learn to be generous one act at a time.

■ “If you can’t feed a hundred people, then feed just one.” —Mother Teresa

**DISCUSS:** Challenge students to answer the question, “As a student, you may be thinking, ‘I don’t have a job or make any money.’ How can you still be generous with the resources you have?”

**DO:** Instruct students to complete the **Heart and Hand** activity.

#### Heart and Hand

Even though you may not have a regular income from a job, or even a regular allowance from your parents, you can still be generous. Even as students, we must be willing to open our hearts and hands to the poor and needy. Think about the different types of resources you’ve been blessed with.

- ▶ Time
- ▶ Talents
- ▶ Finances

What actions can you take to begin practicing generosity for the poor in your school and community?

# Commentary

## DEUTERONOMY 15:7-11

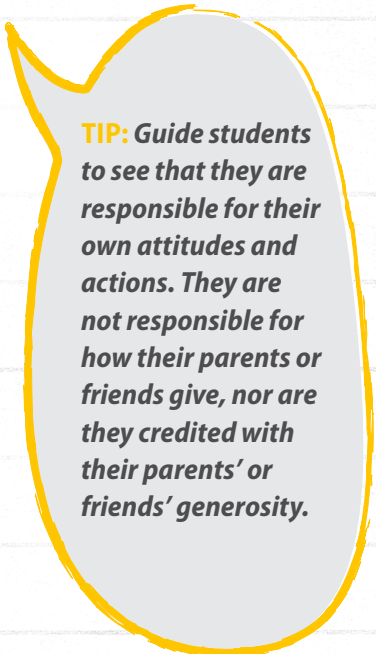
In these verses, the Israelites were about to enter a land flowing with milk and honey (Deut. 6:3), but even in a land of plenty there was anticipation of poverty for some. The Bible teaches the right of owning personal property. The commandment forbidding theft (Ex. 20:15) supports the individual's right to control one's own possessions. The Bible also recognizes the inequality of wealth among people. Wealth obtained legitimately is no vice but does carry certain moral obligations toward the poor.

The Lord instructed those with ability to help not to be hardhearted or tightfisted toward the poor. The use of "brother" indicated a fellow Israelite. Even the mention of the land the Lord gave them was meant to remind the Israelites that whatever they had was a gift from God. There were no "self-made people" in Israel, but each owed whatever they had to the grace and provision of God.

There are no self-made people today, either. Each of us owes our strength, talents, and opportunities to God who provides for us.

How could a person become poor in the promised land? Reasons fell into one of two categories during times of peace. The first involved reasons outside of the person's control, such as theft of animals or equipment necessary to make a living, illness or injury, or the death of a provider. Christians have historically provided help for the impoverished in these circumstances.

The second category of reasons for poverty presents a greater challenge: that of poverty resulting from sinful behavior. Sinful actions consume resources and frequently lead to chronic poverty. The fact that people are sometimes impoverished because of their sinful choices does not absolve us from the responsibility to help; however, we are not to enable people to continue sinful behavior. Paul said concerning those who would not work that they should not be allowed to eat (2 Thess. 3:10). We should not give people money to buy alcohol or drugs or engage in other sinful activities. We should help people to confront their sinful choices and restore them through Christian-based counseling programs.



**TIP:** Guide students to see that they are responsible for their own attitudes and actions. They are not responsible for how their parents or friends give, nor are they credited with their parents' or friends' generosity.

# IMPACT

(10 MINUTES)

**TIP:** *Some of your students may be discouraged because they are limited financially but truly desire to be generous. Encourage them to find other ways to be generous with those in need.*

## APPLY IT

**SAY:** Here are some practical ideas that help you in your journey of helping the poor. Commit to applying one of these in the coming week.

**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read aloud a few ways students can take what they have learned from the session and **Apply It**.

- ▶ **Take a drive with your parents.** Drive through your community. Ask God to open your eyes to the need in your community, perhaps those you've overlooked, and pray that He would help you to generously meet the needs He reveals.
- ▶ **Plan together.** Have a conversation with your family and/or student minister about ways you could respond to the needs of those around you.
- ▶ **Get involved.** Find a gospel-centered ministry your church supports that helps the poor, the orphans, or the needy in your community and world. Consider getting involved in that ministry or become a regular financial supporter of that ministry.

**GUIDE:** Lead students to consider which of the three suggested responses to the Bible study most closely applies to them and their current circumstances.

**ASK:** Which of these responses do you personally need to focus on most as you live this session out? Allow time for responses.

## WRAP UP

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to help students have a generous heart for those in need.

**ASK:** Ask students about last week's **Live It Out** options. Discuss any responses and encourage students as they choose to apply the Bible to their lives.

**GUIDE:** Encourage students to complete one or both of the **Live It Out** activities for the week. Let them know you will discuss them next time you meet.



For **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife**

# LEADER LIVE IT OUT

*Before the session, challenge yourself to grow with your students through this Live It Out.*

## Thankful | 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Take some time this week to reflect on all that God has given you. While you reflect, list in the space below everything you can think of that God has given you—no matter how big or small. If you think you have run out of things, pray and ask God to bring to mind more gifts He has given you. As God brings more to mind, write them down. Spend some time in prayer thanking God for the many blessings in your life.

Notes:

# ONE CONVERSATION™

*Use these discussion starters to help foster a spiritual conversation with your family.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 15:7-11

**THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE:** So many of us can be thankful for our homes, possessions, and comfortable lifestyles. Others among us just barely get by. We often struggle in situations that confront us with the underprivileged. It's often easier to look the other way when we cross paths with someone who is homeless or poor, but God calls us to help people who may be different than us, showing them His love for them.

## STUDENTS

**THE POINT:** We are to imitate God in our desire to help the poor.

- Plan with your student how you and your family can help others who are less fortunate.

Discuss the following quote: "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one."<sup>1</sup> —Mother Teresa

1. "Mother Teresa Quotes" Goodreads.com, [cited 5 May 2014]. Available from the Internet: <http://www.brainyquote.com>.

**LIVE IT OUT:** Your student has been encouraged to do one or both Live It Out activities in the Personal Study Guide. Here are some suggested ways to help your student:

*If your student chooses to do **More Than Words**:*

- Encourage your student to help those in need.
- Help your student gather items to take to a local food pantry.

*If your student chooses to do **Thankful**:*

- Ask your student what he/she is thankful for.
- Share with your student how you've been blessed in your own life.