

# **JUST MERCY FOR THE WIDOW, THE ORPHAN, AND THE FOREIGNER**

**DEUTERONOMY 24: 10-22;  
26:12-15**



**JUST MERCY SERIES**

# **BEFORE**

## **THE LESSON**

This lesson will examine how the Deuteronomic law directed God's people to care for those in need around them. While we as modern Christians do not read Deuteronomy as a prescriptive law by which we live (for instance, most Christians have no concern for wearing clothing of mixed fabric—Deut. 22:11—nor do we first seek the counsel of a priest for skin sickness—Deut. 24:8), the Law books, the first five books of the Bible, offer us important insight into how God and God's people interacted with one another, establishing laws that would honor God and God's desire for creation, and would maintain or restore the disharmony that sinfulness creates. As we read Deuteronomy, we want to pay attention to some of the themes that pop up, and how those themes reveal the heart of God concerning how his people live their lives together with others. One such theme is that of cleanliness. In the Hebrew culture, clean and healthy bodies were directly correlated with healthy spirituality. Uncleanliness and disease were seen as holistic concerns, not just bodily ones. And so, when someone was sick or unclean, they were attended to in a holistic way, caring for their bodies along with their relational well-being (both with God and others).

Another important theme in the Law is the care for the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. This is a common idiom in the Bible for anyone who is in need beyond what they can provide for themselves. The law is deeply concerned with the care of those in need, and as we read in later books, when those in need are neglected, exploited, or dishonored, God's anger burns hot in their defense. Our text in this lesson will examine how the Deuteronomic law can help us know God's heart more and how we can join in God's mission to love others as he loves them.

# STARTING THE LESSON

This lesson will conclude our *Just Mercy* series. In this series, we have examined how God employs justice and mercy. In these studies, we've

seen God's heart and hand in relation to those who are in trouble or need. Christians are called to be citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, partnering with the Holy Spirit to realize the prayer "Let your Kingdom come and your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven." In this lesson, we will look at a passage from the law book Deuteronomy to understand how God is concerned for the poor and what God would have us, his people, do in response to their need and his love for them.

## Tips:

In each study, we provide Starter Questions that are intended to prime the pump for the discussion to come. They generally follow the theme of the study, and can be helpful in identifying how your group is approaching a topic. Pay attention to how your group answers these questions, as this can allow you to address their perspectives or concerns later in the discussion.

## STARTER QUESTIONS

- Have you ever had something unexpectedly paid for you? How did you feel about this gesture?
- Have you ever received a bill for something that caused you to be concerned that you couldn't pay it? How did that make you feel? Did you have to make any adjustments in order to pay this? (Note: It is important to protect the dignity of our members, so be certain to only ask this question if you can confidently avoid anyone feeling shame or judgement.)

# OPENING PRAYER

*Open your discussion with a prayer, thanking God for bringing your group together and invite the Holy Spirit to meet with you as you read and discuss how God loves—and calls us to love—the poor among us.*

## **Deuteronomy 24:10-22**

<sup>10</sup> When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered to you as a pledge. <sup>11</sup> Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. <sup>12</sup> If the neighbor is poor, do not go to sleep with their pledge in your possession. <sup>13</sup> Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the Lord your God.

<sup>14</sup> Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. <sup>15</sup> Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

<sup>16</sup> Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

# SCRIPTURE READING

Because it is a longer passage, ask three people in your group to take a turn reading 4 or 5 verses from Deuteronomy 24:10-22. As a reminder, it is good to encourage slower, clear reading rather than quick reading, so that the group can follow the text closely. Thank your readers for volunteering.

**17** Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. **18** Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. **19** When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. **20** When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. **21** When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. **22** Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **This passage begins with a segment of laws regarding how someone should behave when they are offering a loan to “any kind of neighbor,” beginning with the instruction that the lender should not enter the borrower’s house to obtain their pledge. What might be the purpose of this law?**

- *Note: This is not likely a case of minor loans between friends and neighbors, but major loans where collateral would be expected to ensure the loan was returned.*

- *While we can’t be certain of the purpose behind the lender being directed not to enter the home of the borrower, this might be a measure to prevent the lender from increasing the*

*pledge based on the possessions of the borrower.*

- **What problem might this law be concerned with preventing or correcting? Why would it be important for lender not to see the home or possessions of the person they are lending to?**

- *It seems that this is a law designed to protect people receiving loans from being judged to own too much to deserve a generous loan, or to prevent them from having*

*to pledge over more than what was initially agreed upon prior to the loan.*

- **What does this law tell us about how pledges should be handled, especially for the poor?**
  - *There is a clear indication here that collateral collected for a loan should not cause burden or harm the person taking the loan. It is incumbent on the lender to ensure the well-being of the person who is borrowing from them in this transaction.*
- **How is the way money is loaned today different from the process outlined in this law?**
  - *There are many ways loans are given today, but not many go so far as the Deuteronomic law to ensure that the lender(s) are responsible for the well-being of the people they are lending to. You might consider asking the group why that is and what could be done to change it.*
  - *You may want to emphasize that the law does not direct anyone to refuse a loan to someone who cannot afford their pledge, but rather to return the pledge if it is needed without forgiving the loan. Is there a reason the law does not attempt to block the loan altogether?*
- **Beginning in v.14, we read about a law issued to employers. What are the employers instructed to do and what are they told will happen if they don't comply?**
  - *Employers are to be responsible for the honest and fair treatment of those they hire, especially the poor. They are not to discriminate between persons regarding the wage they pay for work. They are to pay all workers each day before sunset.*
  - *If employers disobey these things, they will be guilty of sin and the Lord will hear the cries of those they've exploited.*

- **Why would the law specifically prohibit exploitation of the foreigner along with the Israelite?**
  - *Apparently, God and God’s people were concerned that some employees were being treated or compensated unequally for the same work, with a preference for the people more similar to the employers. This law addresses such practices of discrimination and unequal treatment, and it prohibits them.*
- **Do these laws have anything to tell us about how God would have Christians pay the people who work for them?**
  - *For the Hebrew people, God clearly had influence over the way work was to be compensated and workers were to be treated. This law forbade discriminatory pay, and insisted that the timing of the payment should be primarily informed by the need of the employees rather than the circumstances of the employer. It seems that Christians have a responsibility to accommodate the needs of employees, individually and systematically.*

In verse 17, the Law says broadly what it has and will continue to address more specifically: “Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.” These laws reveal that individual charity is not the exclusive way to love the poor, needy, and vulnerable as God does. Rather, the way we conduct business, our systems of lending money, and other such things, have the power both to reflect, or to get in the way of God’s love.

- **Why are the Hebrew people to be concerned with the care of the poor, needy, and vulnerable?**
  - *v.18: ‘Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.’*

We may not relate directly to the memory of being slaves under an exploitative king, but one of the incredible graces God offers us is the thankfulness and humility we experience as God deals mercifully and generously with us.

- **How have your past circumstances and God's role in them influenced the way you look at other people?**
  - *For any of us who are thankful for what God has done for us and through us, this verse should remind us to respond to that generosity by being generous, merciful, and loving to others. If God has used our circumstances or other people to bless us, we should be like God by generously blessing others.*

The foreigner, widow, and orphan is an idiom used in Scripture to refer to all people in need. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list of those who need care.

- **What are some of the other categories of people who need care, help, community, and love in our city, country, and world?**
  - *Many answers apply. You may include the sick, developmentally challenged, prisoners, the homeless, the jobless, the disabled, the lonely, the sorrowful, the aging, and the addicted.*

vv. 19-22 directs those harvesting the land to not go back for what they left behind, but to leave the remaining sheaves, olives, and grapes for the foreigner, fatherless, and widow.

- **Are there any lessons we can learn and apply in our lives from vv. 19-22?**
  - These verses might lead us to consider how much we think is enough when it comes to our earnings. We might consider whether we are so meticulous, ambitious, or



concerned about our own security that we forget, or are afraid, to make room for the needs of others.

It's noteworthy that for many Hebrew people in this time, resources like food were relatively limited. A bad year could create deadly scarcity. Even still, the law commands that they do their daily work from a place of trust in God's provisions and echoing generosity rather than from a mood of self-security and tightfistedness.

- **What are some of the reasons that have prevented you from being generous?**

- *Receive all answers. Note: this question is not intended to invoke feelings of guilt nor to be used to judge others. Rather, lead your group in honest sharing about the many legitimate concerns we can have about generosity, while acknowledging that these concerns should be considered against God's generous provisions and that our bold generosity "will be regarded as [righteous acts] in the sight of the Lord." v.13*

In Deuteronomy Chapter 26, the Law goes on to direct God's people to tithe their "firstfruits" to the Lord and that this tithe be designated to the Levite priests (who were forbidden from owning land), the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow "so they might eat in your towns and be satisfied." Caring for those in need was not only a matter of fair wages, just lending practices, and leaving behind what was left. Those who needed help from others were to receive a portion of the first, best earnings of God's people. The best offerings given to the Lord were used to bless the people in need. The quality and quantity of love offered to God in gift was exactly equal to the quantity and quality of provision given to those in need.

- **If we treated the quantity and quality of gifts we gave to those in need around us as though they expressed how much we love God, how might that change the way we give?**

# PRAYER MINISTRY

- The Law we studied in this passage directed God's people to be generous because they had been heard and rescued by God from slavery, and God had abundantly provided for them since. Remembering God's faithfulness and generosity is an important exercise in growing our faithfulness and generosity. Take several minutes to silently sit and allow the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the things God has gifted to the various members of your group. After these minutes are over, break into groups of two or three people and share some of the gifts God has given, and pray for one another that God would remind us of these gifts and use them to grow our generosity.
- Deuteronomy informs us that our economic systems matter to God and should matter to God's people. For many of us, these systems seem so complex that any hope that they would be made just, fair, or "Kingdomly" seems hopeless. But we love and serve a God who is powerful and just. As a group, offer prayers that the Lord would change our society, nationally and locally, and the hearts of our leaders, so that they would be more just, compassionate, and burdened by the plight of those who need their help. After each prayer, say together as a group "Your Kingdom come, your will be done."