

# Life: Ready to help the poor

January 9, 2015

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Jan. 25 focuses on Deuteronomy 15:7-11.*

## Introduction

A friend of mine was raised on the mission field in a foreign land. His father was a medical doctor who labored long and hard to take care of his patients, especially those who were poor. Soon, he began building a hospital with special attention to those in poverty. He led Bible studies, preached in a number of locations on Sundays, and shared the gospel in the variety of interactions with people. Frequently, impoverished people came to him asking for assistance.

He always was ready to help feed the hungry or assist the poor around him. This impressed my friend, who practices his father's principle of responding immediately to the needy who present themselves to him.

Deuteronomy speaks about helping the less fortunate. The book originally was addressed to the children of former slaves. At one time, the people of Israel not only lived in dire poverty, but also were trapped in slavery. The Lord demonstrated his tremendous compassion by rescuing Israel from their situation.

Now, Moses teaches his people one of God's character traits is compassion for all human suffering, including the plight of the unfortunate, down-trodden, mistreated, marginalized and often desperate. Consistently, God will bless his faithful people with plenty so they, in turn, can share with the poor. The present passage is one of several that details how the Lord expects his children to be sensitive of the condition of others around them.

### **Don't be light-hearted or tight-fisted (Deuteronomy 15:7)**

All secular societies have had issues with handling poverty in their midst. Verse 7 delivers five main teachings regarding the treatment of the poor. First, the poor are to be regarded as brothers—family. Their misfortune has not changed their status as citizens of the city or nation. Second, and most importantly, it does not matter how the person came to be in need—they are needy, and God expects his people to lend a hand without bias or judgment. This covers misfortune, as well as laziness and lack of wisdom.

Third, no matter where in the land the less fortunate are encountered, they still are to be regarded as brothers. There are to be no poverty zones where the poor are accepted. Furthermore, God's people are not to change their heart sentiments regarding the poor. This reinforces the second point. All people are to be regarded as beloved brothers. Finally, one should not shut his hand against the poor. This means one must be willing to lend a hand and offer assistance—financial and otherwise.

### **Share freely when you see a need (Deuteronomy 15:8-9)**

During the Great Depression, a young man stood barefoot in the snow outside a shoe store. He silently studied the display. A well-dressed woman noticed him. She turned to him and asked if he had some shoes. He shook his head and started on his way. She took his arm and headed into the shoe store. She told the clerk she wanted to purchase a pair of shoes for the boy. The clerk remarked he was dirty. She asked for the wash room. She returned with a bowl of warm water and washed the lad's feet. She had him fitted with socks and shoes. At last the shocked young man spoke up, asking, "Are you God?" "No," she said, "but I know him."

Those who know God know his compassion for the needy. Moses instructed the people of God to lend according to the need. This means resolving the need when possible. The condition of the heart of the one helping is

important, however. Moses reminds his people to beware if the counsel of their heart pushes them to deny help. The Lord is motivated to listen to the urgent pleadings of the poor, and it would not go well for God's follower if they were not obeying their Lord. God considers it sin to deny assistance to the needy.

### **God blesses us and our giving (Deuteronomy 15:10-11)**

In these last verses, God the Father instructs his children: "This is the way we handle these types of things in this family." God can instruct the heart because he created it, and he is the Almighty in authority over the heart. Therefore, God's children must give freely, because they have been recipients of God's grace in the time of utter need. God blesses his children so they have enough for themselves and some to administer to others whom God brings their way. God wants his people sharing the message of his compassion for lost and needy humanity by meeting the needs of people as they arise.

Verse 11 acknowledges there always will be poor people. Thus, by implication, God's people always will be helping the needy. There are thousands of reasons why people are poor, from government policy down to bad individual choices. But the Lord is attentive and compassionate regarding the plight of those suffering in poverty. God does not dwell upon the reasons for their condition. His great concern for needful humanity caused him to send his Son into this world to answer humanity's direst need. It cost Jesus his life, but he answered the need.

Therefore, God's people must be ready to help the poor. Developing a set of operating principles for assisting the needy is a good way to prepare for the less fortunate that God will bring into our lives.