

“The Poor and Needy”
Proverbs 14:31
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Main Idea: How we relate to those in need reveals how we relate to God himself.

Key Points:

1. **The way we treat the poor is how we regard and treat God (Proverbs 14:31a)**
 - a. Regardless of where a person lives, how much money they make, where they went to school or what neighborhood they live in, we are to remember that every human being is created in the image of God.
 - i. All are created in God’s image: “The rich and the poor meet together; *the LORD is the maker of them all.*” (Proverbs 22:2)
 - b. Sometimes we cloak oppression of the poor and needy by calling it “good business sense”. God calls it oppression. The Lord says this kind of oppression is an insult to him. It shows contempt—a total disregard and lack of respect for God, Himself.
 - i. Warning not to grow rich at the poor’s expense: “Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty. (Proverbs 22:16)
 - ii. Warning against stealing from the fatherless: “do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless...” (Proverbs 23:10)
 - iii. Warning against using the legal system to oppress the poor: “Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate.” (Proverbs 22:22)
 - c. Over and over again, Proverbs tells us that God rises up to defend and protect the poor, needy and oppressed.
 - i. “Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, *for the LORD will plead their cause* and rob of life those who rob them.” (Proverbs 22:22-23)
 - ii. “Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless, *for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you.*” (Proverbs 23:10-11)
 - d. For many, the presenting issue is in our hearts. For those of a different socio-economic background, we have displeased the Lord by harboring attitudes of superiority or by avoiding friendship and fellowship.
2. **We honor the Lord when we are generous to the needy (Proverbs 14:31b)**
 - a. When we share what God has given us with those who have less, we honor the Lord. We acknowledge Him and display our great respect and love for Him.
 - i. “Whoever is generous to the poor *lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.*” (Proverbs 19:17)

- b. Where do we begin?
 - i. Scripture tells us to start with our families (see 1 Tim. 5:8)
 - ii. Our next priority is to the family of God (see Gal. 6:10)
 - iii. Next, we should be ready to help anyone who cross our path—even our enemies. (see Luke 10:25-37)

3. The gospel motivates our compassion for the poor and needy (2 Cor. 8:9)

- a. In the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we encounter a God who identifies with the poor and needy in the deepest way imaginable.
 - i. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that *though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor*, so that you by his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

"Like nothing else could ever do, the gospel instills in me a heart for the downcast, the poverty-stricken, and those in need of physical mercies, especially when such persons are of the household of faith.

When I see persons who are materially poor, I instantly feel a kinship with them, for they are physically what I was spiritually when my heart was closed to Christ. Perhaps some of them are in their condition because of sin, but so was I. Perhaps they are unkind when I try to help them; but I, too, have been spiteful to God when He has sought to help me. Perhaps they are thankless and even abuse the kindness I show them, but how many times have I been thankless and used what God has given me to serve selfish ends?

Perhaps a poverty-stricken person will be blessed and changed as a result of some kindness I show him. If so, God be praised for His grace through me. But if the person walks away unchanged by my kindness, then I still rejoice over the opportunity to love as God loves. Perhaps the person will repent in time; but for now, my heart is chastened and made wiser by the tangible depiction of what I myself have done to God on numerous occasions.

The gospel reminds me daily of the spiritual poverty into which I was born and also of the staggering generosity of Christ towards me. Such reminders instill in me both a felt connection to the poor and a desire to show them the same generosity that has been lavished on me. When ministering to the poor with these motivations, I not only preach the gospel to them through word and deed, but I reenact the gospel to my own benefit as well."

—Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians*

Fellowship Starters:

- 1. Why does Scripture tell us that the way we relate to those in need reveals how we relate to God, Himself?

2. Are there any specific ways—in your family, at work or within the church—you have disregarded the needs of the poor? What would repentance and change look like?
3. Josh taught us that oppression of the poor can also be an attitude of the heart. Do you harbor any attitudes of superiority toward the poor or needy? Have you withheld friendship or fellowship from someone because of their financial status? How can you grow and change?
4. Are you aware of any in need (in your family, within or outside the church) for whom you could show compassion by giving of your time and/or resources?
5. How should the gospel envision and motivate us to demonstrate love and care to the poor and needy?