

Neighbors and Nations

Week 3 | Serving our Local Community

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During his time on earth, Jesus demonstrated his immense compassion for people. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, welcomed the marginalized, and loved the outcasts. It's not surprising that the Son of God showed such mercy. The Jewish Scriptures are full of examples of God's grace and love going all the way back to humanity's creation. It's who God is.

In our Neighbors and Nations series, we've been considering how we can represent Jesus in our everyday lives. As Christ's ambassadors, we are called to share Jesus' truth and compassion with the world. This week we're focusing on how we can serve our local community.

The economies of the world have been hard hit by COVID-19 and the measures taken to limit its spread. Many people right here in Collin County have lost jobs or had their hours reduced and are struggling to take care of themselves and their families. People are also paying a high mental and emotional toll because of recent events, resulting in more addictions, mental health issues, and domestic violence. The needs of our community are great, and God is calling his people to show love and compassion to those who are suffering.

Day 1

Let's start this week by asking a startling question — why should we have compassion on those in poverty? Those on the margins of society? Not everyone does. If you look across the sweep of history and even among some people today, you'll find those with no compassion for the poor. They assume that those without means deserve their lot in life, either because they are inherently unworthy, or because their past choices have made them somehow irredeemable.

The Bible takes a different view, and therefore so should we.

We're going to look at several verses this week, starting with two from Proverbs. How do you think these proverbs help us answer the question, "why should we have compassion on those in poverty?"

Read

Proverbs 14:31

*Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.*

Proverbs 21:13

Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.

- What do you think it means to “oppress the poor”?
- What do you think it means to “shut one’s ears” to the cries of the poor?

Reflect

God created humanity to form loving communities, but sin often corrupts the way people see others. Fear of scarcity promotes the hoarding of resources. Selfish desires promote exploitation. Human beings can become indifferent to one another’s suffering, or even participate in it. This was not the way it was meant to be.

Genesis 1:27 teaches us that, “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Every person is an image-bearer and as such has inherent dignity, worth, and value. It’s something that every person shares with another.

In the book of Job, Job echoes this idea when he gives the reasons why he hasn’t “denied justice to his servants” or “denied the desires of the poor.” He asks rhetorically, “Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?” (Job 31:15) Every human being who has ever lived shares the same origin story — they were created in love by God.

When we fail to recognize the commonalities we all share, it can be easy to dismiss the cries of those in need. Proverbs 21:13 warns us against this. God does not take our indifference or neglect lightly. We see over and over in the Jewish Scriptures that one of the primary sins that God judged ancient Israel for was their oppression of the poor and vulnerable.

Proverbs 14:31 reminds us that when we exploit those in need, we are showing contempt for the One who created them. We are failing to acknowledge them as his image-bearers. No matter how society judges them or how they judge themselves, they are worthy of kindness. God sees them, he has not forgotten them, and neither should we.

When we show compassionate care for those in need, we are honoring God. We are acknowledging the goodness and mercy he offers to all people. We are exalting the God who creates in love and desires to shower people with grace. When we help others who are in need, we are worshipping the one who made us all.

Respond

How do you tend to think of those who are economically disadvantaged? How does Proverbs 14:31 and 21:13 challenge you?

Mission Partner Spotlight

We're continuing to highlight some of Christ Fellowship's mission partners. The ones we will focus on this week serve our local community.

Community Food Pantry of McKinney

Many families in our community live paycheck to paycheck and are one crisis away from going hungry. The Community Food Pantry is a nonprofit outreach program that provides food to families who have found themselves in crisis because of job loss, illness, a death in the family, or other calamity.

“Our primary goal is to insure that no one goes to bed hungry. Once that goal is met, we strive to guide and assist them in finding a more permanent solution to the existing crisis.”

To find more, go to their [website](#).

Day 2

When God led his people out of Egypt and established them as a nation, he gave them instructions to guide their treatment of one another. They were to be a holy nation who reflected his goodness and righteousness into the world. So, when we look at the Old Testament laws, we can see the expectations that God had for his people at that time in history. We can also discover timeless principles that should guide our behavior today.

As we discovered yesterday, God cares for all people because all people are created in his image. He expects us to treat them accordingly, and that applies to the materially under-resourced and those who live at the margins of society. These are people that society often overlooks or even exploits, but God sees them, knows them, and loves them. We have an opportunity to share that love.

Today, let's look at one of the provisions that God gave the Israelites for taking care of those in need.

Read

Leviticus 19:9–10

⁹ “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. ¹⁰ Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.

- How would the poor be helped by these commands?

Reflect

In these commands we see an important principle for aiding those in material poverty. The Israelites were taught to see all their blessings as gifts from God. An abundant harvest was the provision of a loving God and the people were to share that blessing. In the course of gleaning their fields, the owners were to provide for impoverished Israelites and foreigners alike. No one should go hungry.

By leaving some areas unharvested, and by not going back over the fields a second time, there would be something left for those who needed food. Yet, this was not a handout. Those who had fallen on hard times could come and harvest the remaining crops. They did not have to beg for charity, but could work for what they needed.

We can apply this principle to how we help people today. When someone is in a crisis, we offer whatever immediate help is needed, but that’s not a long term solution. Because people are created in the image of God, they were created for meaningful work. Ideally we want to grant people the dignity and sense of purpose that comes from such work, while helping them meet their immediate physical needs.

In his book, *When Helping Hurts*, Steve Corbett notes that often impoverished groups around the world describe their situation in ways that go beyond their physical needs. “Poor people typically talk in terms of shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, social isolation, and voicelessness.” In our efforts to help, we want to reduce these feelings, and not exacerbate them.

Therefore, Corbett advises a more holistic approach to helping those in material poverty:

“If we reduce human beings to being simply physical—as Western thought is prone to do—our poverty-alleviation efforts will tend to focus on material solutions. But if we remember that humans are spiritual, social, psychological, and physical beings, our poverty-alleviation efforts will be more holistic in their design and execution.”

The gospel of Jesus Christ rescues the whole person. It saves us and grants us eternal life, and it also restores the dignity and worth that was stolen by sin. The gospel gives us hope. As ambassadors of Christ, this is the message we can share through our words and actions with all people, including those who are in material need. How we help those in need matters.

Respond

How does the gospel address the whole person? What would a gospel-oriented approach to helping the under-resourced look like?

Mission Partner Spotlight

This week we're focusing on our ministry partners that serve our local community. 3e United takes the kind of holistic approach to helping the under-resourced that *When Helping Hurts* advocates.

3e United

"3e United (formerly 3e McKinney) was founded in 2006 by retired McKinney City Manager Larry Robinson and a group of churches who agreed that coordinating our human and financial capital to work together could have a much greater impact on the empowerment of our materially under-resourced neighbors than we could alone."

Their initiatives include:

- *Adopt The School Program*: The success of all our public schools is a key element within the ecosystem of a flourishing city. Adopt The Schools matches churches with Title 1 schools to equip, engage, and empower all stakeholders to cultivate thriving schools, where all children can reach their highest potential. Currently we have 9 schools in McKinney ISD that are adopted.
- *Thrive Collin County*: Millions of people in the world today are without work or underemployed. Without meaningful work, there is a loss of purpose and dignity. This creates a vicious cycle of poverty—economically, spiritually, and emotionally. Currently, our team is at work to engineer a Holistic Job Preparation, Job Training, Job Placement and Entrepreneurship Program called Thrive Collin County.
- *Faith and Finances*: Faith & Finances is a 12-week financial education workshop for people who are just starting out learning how to manage money; don't have a lot of money to spare; desire to overcome financial obstacles; and want to save more and pay off debt.

Find out more on the [3e United website](#).

Day 3

For the past couple of months here at Christ Fellowship, we've been talking a lot about tables and the conversations that can happen around them. To invite someone to your table is not only an act of hospitality and kindness, but it shows them honor. If done right, you are giving your guests the opportunity to feel known and loved.

In the story from the Gospel of Luke that we are looking at today, Jesus talks about one group of people we should invite to our tables and why.

Read

Luke 14:12–14

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

- Who does Jesus say we should invite to our tables and why?

Reflect

Luke tells us that Jesus gives this pronouncement at the home of a prominent Pharisee. Jesus had already warned the guests against jockeying for position to sit at the head of the table. He concludes this warning by saying, “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). Jesus’ instructions go beyond having good manners at a dinner party.

One of the many wonderful things about being a Christ follower is the relief that comes with knowing your worth. You don’t have to step over others to prove your value or scrap and claw to find honor. In Christ, you are completely loved and accepted by the Creator of the universe. You don’t have to exalt yourself, because Jesus has already given you a seat of honor at his table. Instead, you are free to be humble and exalt others.

In the ancient world, hosts were careful about who they invited to their tables. Roman society was obsessed with status, and the Jewish elite with purity. Like many in our current culture, they had a harsh, utilitarian view of people — only those who contribute, excel, and achieve in material ways are truly valuable. On the other hand, Jesus says to invite to our tables those who can give us nothing in return.

It is an act of both humility and faith. By accepting people who can never repay us monetarily, we are acknowledging God’s provision for us and trusting in his continued goodness. As N.T. Wright says, “Pride, notoriously, is the great cloud which blots out the sun of God’s generosity: if I reckon that I deserve to be favoured by God, not only do I declare that I don’t need his grace, mercy and love, but I imply that those who don’t deserve it shouldn’t have it.”¹

So who can we invite to our “tables”? How can we show kindness and honor to those our society often over looks? While those in need may not be able to repay us materially, they have much to offer. Just as he has done for us, God has given them gifts, talents, and abilities. Discovering how to honor those is part of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

¹ Tom Wright, [*Luke for Everyone*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 175–176.

Respond

- How can you worship God for his generosity? How can giving to those in need help us better experience the generosity of God?
- How can you give welcome, acceptance, and help to those in need in our community?

Mission Partner Spotlight

Hope Clinic of McKinney

“Hope Clinic of McKinney is a free medical, vision, and behavioral health clinic serving low-income uninsured McKinney families. We share the love of Christ by partnering with our community to provide quality, compassionate health care by licensed, volunteer doctors and nurses.”

“Our vision is to become the full time medical home for over 1,000 uninsured residents in our city. We strive to create a space where everyone is treated with dignity, respect and love while delivering high quality medical, wellness and spiritual care. Twelve percent of McKinney residents are without medical insurance. In East McKinney where Hope Clinic is located, the need is even higher. In June 2016, a team of volunteers and partners formed to bring our mission of Hope and Healing in McKinney to life.”

Check out [their website](#) for some amazing stories of life change and to find out more about Hope Clinic.

Day 4

Today we’re going to look at a well-known passage, the story of the Good Samaritan. If it’s a familiar story to you, it may have lost some of its narrative punch. So read it slowly, and try and visualize the story unfolding in front of you. Imagine hearing it for the first time.

Read

Luke 10:25–37

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

²⁷ He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

- What does the Samaritan do for the wounded man that the Jewish leaders do not?
- Does Jesus answer the question posed to him (see verse 29)? Explain your answer.
- Samaritans were despised by the Jews, so having one as the hero of the story would have been jarring to Jesus’ audience. What point do you think Jesus is making?

Reflect

What does it mean to be loved by God and share his love in return?

Loving your neighbor as yourself was part of the instructions God gave Israel through Moses. *“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord”*(Leviticus 19:18). This is an incredibly difficult calling. It shouldn’t surprise us that in his day, Jesus was asked, “who is my neighbor?”

The temptation is to define this command as narrowly as possible. It would be easier to follow if our neighbors looked, thought, believed, and behaved like we do. It would be easier to love and serve people like us. The story of the Good Samaritan doesn’t let us get away with such thinking. Loving people who are easy to love is not at all what Jesus did, and it’s not what he calls his followers to do.

There is a sacrificial element to love. It's not "loving our neighbor" to love and serve only those who will be willing and able to reciprocate. Loving someone means putting others ahead of ourselves. That's what Jesus did when he went to the cross to save us from our sins.

In 1973 two social scientists conducted a "good Samaritan" experiment. They asked 67 seminary students to prepare a sermon on the good Samaritan passage that we read above. On the day they were assigned to speak, students were told the event had been moved all the way across campus at the last minute. As they rushed to the other side of campus to give their sermons, a person pretending to be hurt and in distress was placed directly in their path. How many do you think stopped to help?

Even with the message of the good Samaritan fresh in their minds, even as they were prepared to exhort others to love their neighbors, only 10% stopped to help. Do you think you would have stopped?

In Jesus' story, the religious leaders who passed by the wounded man would have been considered the super-holy people of their community. But while they knew a lot about God and his law, Jesus indicates that they had missed the heart of who God is and what he asks of his people. They were not the one who imitated God in their actions. The Samaritan was.

As followers of Jesus who have been saved by his sacrifice and filled with the Holy Spirit, we want to be more and more like Jesus. We want to see people as Jesus sees us, and love people the way that Jesus loves us. We will still fail and fall short, but as we participate with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we will be moved to greater and greater compassion. Even in the busyness of our lives, we'll stop and go out of our way to help those in need.

I'm not there yet. Maybe you're not either. But let's pray for the Spirit's conviction and then act in ways that truly love all of our neighbors.

Respond

As you go before the Lord in prayer, ask him to convict you of your indifference to those in need, remind you of his immense love for you, and reveal to you ways you can help.

As you've read about many of our mission partners over the last few weeks, is there one you feel led to get involved with?

Mission Partner Spotlight

Right here in our local community we have neighbors in crisis who need our help. Here are two more of Christ Fellowship's ministry partners who are doing amazing work.

Breaking Free

At Breaking Free, we believe that God will touch, heal, and deliver men and women who are chemically addicted and empower them to live a drug/alcohol free life. We are committed to

the development of the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of those with life-controlling dependency issues.

Our purpose is to help these men and women become whole and productive members of society. We also believe God has a destiny and purpose for these individuals. We offer group therapy, individual counseling, life skills, aftercare education, and support. We also offer vocational skills for our long term programs.

To find out more, visit their [website](#).

Hope Women's Center

An unplanned pregnancy can be overwhelming. Hope Women's Center is there to provide support and resources to help women along this new journey. They provide pregnancy testing, ultra sounds, options counseling, and more. Every service they provide is free and confidential.

To find out more, visit their [website](#).

Day 5

This week in our Neighbors and Nations series we've considered God's call to help those in our communities who are in need. Take some time to reflect on the passages we covered, the ministries we highlighted, and pray for wisdom in how you should respond.

Reflect

[Proverbs 14:31](#)

[Proverbs 21:13](#)

[Leviticus 19:9-10](#)

[Luke 14:12-14](#)

[Luke 10:25-37](#)

Connect

As you reflect on what God showed you in his Word this week, read this story from Hugo, who received help from Hope Clinic.

“I really [got] to know through Hope Clinic that there are still people that care about you. Thank the Lord that I have made friendships. I get help and I think I am walking in the right direction.”

Hugo’s life was turned upside down when he was arrested and held for several months in jail. Hugo had broken no laws. He was working and taking care of his responsibilities, so why was this happening? He later discovered that his arrest was due to mistaken identity. When the police discovered the mistake, they released him.

Hugo was eager to return to the life he knew, but quickly realized that the life he knew had fallen apart while he was away. His immigration status had lapsed, his apartment and its contents were confiscated, his truck—his source of livelihood—was towed. Everything was taken. Without a job or money, Hugo became homeless.

To complicate matters, Hugo’s health suffered. “In those days, I was very sick with my [high blood] pressure and I did not have medication.” Hugo needed medical attention badly. Thankfully, he learned about Hope Clinic and was able to receive much-needed medical care.

Hugo acknowledges that he was given more than treatment for his chronic health issues; he felt truly cared for. He appreciates that the volunteer doctors and nurses of Hope Clinic go to great lengths to communicate with him, to get to know him and show him genuine concern. “Other clinics you go [to], they attend to you but that is it. They don’t know your name.” This is not so with Hope Clinic.

Hugo laughs as he recounts walking up to the clinic one day. He talks about two women walking out of the clinic, laughing and talking. “One woman said to the other, ‘You look better already!’ Her friend replied, ‘I feel cured already, the way they treat me in there!’” Hugo agrees saying, “I feel that [too].”

Hugo knows that there are many sick people in McKinney. They need medical attention but cannot access adequate care because they do not have health insurance or money to cover the cost of their care. He wants more people to learn about Hope Clinic and has decided to get the word out however he can.

Hugo’s story is just one of many. Every local ministry that Christ Fellowship partners with could tell you story after story of people whose lives have been changed. God is doing amazing things right here in North Texas, and he is using ordinary people like you and me to do them. But the needs are so great.

Let’s not be like the priest and the Levite in the story of the good Samaritan. Let’s not walk by those in need. Let’s allow Jesus’ priorities to become our own.

Respond

At the end of this series, on November 15 and 22, we’ll be asking our Christ Fellowship family to donate to a missions offering. This offering will fund our partnerships with organizations like the ones highlighted this week, Community Food Pantry, 3e United, Hope Clinic,

Breaking Free, and Hope Women's Center. Begin praying now about how you might participate.

All of the organizations we've highlighted need volunteers to run. Are there any you could support with your time or other resources?

Our annual Christmas Care Angels drive is coming up! We're hoping to bless 600 local children this year by giving parents a gift card to buy presents for their child, and children a gift box filled with goodies from our Christ Fellowship families. Gift boxes will be available for you to pick up and fill on November 1.

For all our Neighbors and Nations resources, visit Christ Fellowship's special [Neighbors and Nations page](#).