

Wise Treatment of the Poor

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[0:00] I'm grateful for the opportunity to preach this morning on the book of Proverbs, and specifically the issue of wealth and poverty and wisdom. Pastor Mike is in the middle of a series on the book of Matthew right now, and a few weeks ago he emphasized Jesus' message that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

And that has really been meaningful to me over the last few weeks, it seems to emphasize that. I've thought about that a lot, and I know that our small group has talked about that.

That simple statement, that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, is a great reminder to all of us, as individuals and as a church, of our gospel mission here in downtown Kenosha.

And we're reminded of our strategic location here. We're in contact with so many people who are needy, both in terms of their backgrounds and circumstances, but also, most importantly, because they need Jesus.

The harvest is plentiful, and we have the opportunity to work for Jesus' kingdom. When Mike asked me to speak, he suggested that I preach from the Old Testament, which is fine with me, since that's what I teach.

[1:19] And I thought about what I might speak on. I thought it might be helpful for all of us to consider that the book of Proverbs has some important things to say about money and wealth and poverty.

We want our perspective about wealth and poverty to be in sync and informed by the wisdom that's taught in God's word.

It is particularly relevant for our church because of our location, because this is a particular ministry we have to the people around us in our community.

And it's a topic that's related to gospel ministry because when we are out representing God and telling people about his word and his kingdom, they are learning who he is as they watch us.

And so the more that our values and our perspective are in sync with his, the more faithful we will be in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with them. Let's start this morning with prayer.

[2:19] Father, we believe in the Holy Spirit. And we pray that he would be at work in our midst this morning.

I pray that in my weakness that you would help me to re-speak your word faithfully and clearly this morning. And I pray that for all of us, you would help us to learn from your word.

And that you would be at work in our midst here this morning. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. There's an old story, you've probably heard it, about three men who have never seen an elephant before and who are asked to describe it.

So they take some time to examine the elephant and then they offer their insights. And the first man says that an elephant is long and skinny like a snake. And the second man says, no, no, I don't know what you're talking about.

I don't know what kind of an elephant you're examining. An elephant is thick and round like the trunk of a tree. And the third man says, well, I don't know what you guys are examining here, but I think that an elephant is wide and circular like a disc.

[3:26] Well, obviously, the three men are examining a different part of the elephant. One is feeling the trunk. One has his arms around one of the big legs.

One is up on the back. And so what they're saying is true to a certain extent, but they are not including all of the information in their analysis.

Why is that? Because they're blind. And no matter how hard they try to examine that elephant with all of the information, they're just not capable of stepping back and looking at the whole thing all at once and saying, this is what an elephant is.

They lack perspective. But because they're blind, it's impossible for them to gain the whole perspective. They can move. They can move from the trunk to the leg to the tail and then back up to the ear again.

But without their sight, they're never going to be able to have a proper perspective, a proper vantage point about an elephant because it's just too big. Without their sight, they don't have the tools that they need to explain it properly.

[4:31] And life can be a little bit like that elephant. Think about how big and complex our lives are. There are all kinds of things that we have to navigate on a regular basis, relationships and responsibilities and encountering people with different values, priorities and thinking about power structures and authority and morality and politics and the different opportunities that we face.

We only get one life and we want to live it well. But in order to do that, we have to be able to understand how the world really works.

We have to be able to have a broad perspective about the world in order to avoid the pitfalls, in order to really to get ahead. This is the intent of wisdom.

Wisdom seeks to describe life accurately so that we can plot our course and live skillfully. Wisdom seeks to describe life like that elephant. And the book of Proverbs is a book about wisdom.

It contains a lot of wise sayings about many, many different topics. Parenting and money and sexuality, friendships, government. But these sayings in the book of Proverbs aren't the sum total of wisdom.

[5:47] Instead, we should think about Proverbs as a textbook with case studies in it to teach us how to be wise no matter what situation we face. In other words, it's more than the sum of its parts.

The goal in Proverbs is not just to get any one of these individual situations right, but to be wise. To learn how to be wise in every life situation.

To have the skill of wisdom. So that no matter what situation in life we tackle, we think about it properly with the right perspective. And what is that right perspective?

What is that perspective that helps us to see everything correctly and to make decisions on that correct basis? It is the fear of the Lord. Lou just read from Proverbs 1-7 earlier in the service.

This is the thesis statement of the book of Proverbs. It says this, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. This is the key to wisdom.

[6:47] This is the prerequisite to wisdom. The fear of the Lord. You can stand back and you can try and describe this elephant called life all you want, but without the fear of the Lord, you are effectively blind.

Without the fear of the Lord, you don't have the perspective, and you can't have the perspective, that you need to live life properly and faithfully. There is a God. And He is a great God.

And He created everything that exists. We are His creatures. He made the world a particular way. He rewards good and punishes evil. He knows all things and will act in accordance of His values.

And so this orientation toward the fear of the Lord is crucial, and in the book of Proverbs, it runs through the entire book. It starts in chapter 1, verse 7 as a thesis statement, and it runs in chapter after chapter, chapter 2, chapter 3, chapter 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, and all the way through the book. This is the argument, the backbone that runs through the entire book of Proverbs. Listen to this in Proverbs 3, 7. Be not wise in your own eyes.

[7:53] Be not wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It's an interesting Proverbs because it says that there is a basic sort of incomplete wisdom that is wisdom in our own eyes.

That's where we try and get things done, get things right based on just what we can see around us. And then there is a deeper wisdom. There is a truer wisdom that is rooted in the fear of the Lord. Proverbs 22, 4 says, The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life. The fear of the Lord produces humility, and the fear of the Lord is a kind of humility because we're recognizing our right place before God.

These statements about the fear of the Lord are anchor points in the book of Proverbs. This is the key to seeing the world rightly and living skillfully. The fear of the Lord is not the trunk of the elephant.

It's not the tail of the elephant. It's our sight. It gives us the ability to see the world correctly. And while the secular person, the person without God, stumbles around doing the best they can with an incomplete view, the one who fears the Lord takes off the blindfold and says, It's an elephant.

[9:14] I can see it now. I can see everything from the proper perspective, and I know what to do. So our task today is to see what the book of Proverbs has to teach us about money, and in light of that, how to treat the poor.

How does a wise person treat the poor? I would guess that if we went out here on the streets of Kenosha or down to Pleasant Prairie and we asked people, how should we treat the poor? Why should we treat them that way? We would get a whole variety of answers, and those answers would probably be based upon whether we vote Republican or Democrat. Those answers would probably be based on whether that person has experienced poverty himself or herself.

There would be all kinds of influences, what our parents have taught us about wealth, what we've learned in school, just sort of our overall perspective about money.

But if we fear the Lord, what effect does that have on money and how we treat the poor? So I want to see what Proverbs has to say about this, and the way that I've gone about this is I've gone through the whole book of Proverbs, and I've identified every single verse in the book that has to do with poverty.

[10:22] Then I, based on what those teach, I've collected them into five groups. Five thematic groups that wind their way through the book of Proverbs like threads, and so what we're going to do is we're just going to sort of trace those threads through the book of Proverbs.

We're going to look at some key examples, not every one because there's too many of them, but some key examples for each of those threads that wind their way through the book. The first three threads just describe reality.

They just describe the way life is, the way the world works. They're about having a proper perspective about poverty, and then the fourth and fifth thread are action threads, and those are the ones that teach us how to act on that basis.

So, I don't know if you've ever done these Bible drills as you were a kid where you, you know, keep your Bible closed, and then someone announces the verse, and you race to see who can get there first, but we're going to look at a lot of verses.

We're going to kind of work our way through the book, and let's start in Proverbs 10, 15. Proverbs chapter 10, 15. The book of Proverbs is not going to give us a list of rules for how to treat the poor.

[11:30] However, it's trying to shape in us a theological worldview that has implications. It's trying to shape in us a theological worldview that is based in the fear of the Lord and determines how we make decisions, even about something as practical as money.

So, let's look at Proverbs 10, 15. The first thread describes the first reality, which is the poor are vulnerable. The poor are vulnerable.

Look at Proverbs 10, 15. A rich man's wealth is his strong city. The poverty of the poor is their ruin. In the ancient world, there were many, many dangers out in the countryside around the cities.

There were wild animals. There were bandits. There was the threat of a surprise attack from an enemy army. And the only thing standing between you and all the dangers that were out there in the middle of the night were the walls of your city that you could run inside and hide behind if the need arose.

And in spite of all the dangers, and even though your house itself was pretty small and pretty rickety and you had a thatched roof and everything, even though it wasn't much, you could sleep well at night knowing that there would be no nasty surprises.

[12:44] Because the howls of the wolves and the clank of the army of the soldiers was out there on the other side of that wall. Wealth is kind of like that, isn't it?

Because the wealth of a rich man is his strong city. You can sleep well at night if you have money. Did your furnace just break? Well, that's a huge hassle.

But just fix it. Did your car break down? Again, no one wants to go through that. It's kind of a pain, but just take it to the shop. You have an unexpected bill?

Then let's just write a check. You can afford a lawyer or an accountant or a financial advisor. But look at the second line in this verse in 10:15.

The poverty of the poor is their ruin. Ruin here means the ruins of the city, the ruins of the wall. Imagine the uncertainty of sleeping out at night in a wild land with no city walls around you, just the rubble.

[13:47] And as you try to drift off to sleep, you hear the howls of the wild animal. Something, a branch cracks and you wonder who's trying to sneak up on you in the dark.

You're vulnerable. It's stressful. This is the misery of poverty. Constantly exposed to uncertainty. And knowing that when tragedy strikes, you will not have the resources to get out of it. You're dependent upon other people. You don't prioritize your wants.

You prioritize your needs. That is a hard way to spend the night and it's a hard way to live. Let's flip over a couple of chapters to Proverbs 19:6.

Look at 19:6. It says this. Many seek the favor of a generous man and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts.

[14:48] Many seek the favor of a generous man. Yeah, that's because if you have money, people want a piece of that. Right? Everyone's coming looking for donations. They promise that if you give a certain amount of money to their organization, they will put you in the ambassador's club.

If you give enough money, they will put you in the gold circle. They'll take a brick and put your name on it and put it up in the wall for all time to honor you as someone who has given money. We want the wealthy to live in our neighborhoods.

We want the wealthy to sit on our school boards and sometimes on our church boards. If you have money, you have automatic influence. But contrast this with the next verse.

Look down at verse 7. All a poor man's brothers hate him. How much more do his friends go far from him? He pursues them with words but does not have them.

Everyone seeks out the rich, but even the poor man's brothers reject him because he's a burden, because he's of no practical use.

[15:51] There's no trickle down from the poor. He isn't going to help anyone with networking or further their careers or provide them with a better job or give them some sort of profit in business.

And so whereas the rich man is actively attracting friends, the poor person cannot even maintain those relationships that should be automatic, like brothers.

Now, the book of Proverbs is not saying that this situation is good or bad. It's not evaluating anything here. It's just describing reality. It's simply true that it is hard to be poor.

It comes with a low social status. It comes with a lack of influence. It can feel humiliating. It often involves rejection. And it leads to vulnerability because there are all kinds of troubles in life, but without the resources to take care of those.

But these Proverbs, even though they're just describing reality, they do seek to evoke compassion in us, for the rich to be compassionate about the state of the poor, to be realistic about the situation of the poor.

[17:05] And when the rich are wrangling over politics or property values or unemployment rates, it's so easy to think in terms of statistics. You hear people on TV blaming the poor for being poor or talking about the problem of poverty in society.

But often it's just statistics. But here in Proverbs, we have some realism. This is hard. This is a hard way to live. No one wants to camp out in the ruins.

The poor, though, can look at these verses and know that God has compassion on them because there is acknowledgement about the difficulty. The second thread that we want to look at, the second thread, reality number two, is that character, virtue, is more important than wealth.

Let's look at Proverbs 16.8. Proverbs 16.8. So we'll go back now and we'll go back through again. Proverbs 16.8. It is difficult to be poor.

And in fact, the poor are so vulnerable that it seems like it would make sense that almost anything would be worth avoiding poverty. It seems like that if we're looking for the good life, almost anything would be worth getting wealth.

[18:22] But Proverbs says we have to keep wealth in proper perspective and not overvalue it. As powerful as money is, and it is powerful, there are many things in life that are more important than money.

Look at Proverbs 16.8. Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice. This is one of the so-called better than Proverbs, which says that something A with B is better than the opposite of A along with the opposite of B.

In other words, poverty is not good. But righteousness is so important that it is worth having righteousness even if poverty comes along with it. That's quite a statement.

These better than Proverbs in the book are intended to teach the value of virtues, but they also prioritize those virtues way above wealth. Wealth and poverty are inconsequential categories compared to the importance of righteousness.

Listen to these examples quickly as I read them. We won't turn there. Listen quickly. Proverbs 16.16. How much better to get wisdom than gold to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

[19:33] Proverbs 16.19. It is better to be of lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud. Proverbs 17.1. Better is a dry morsel, like a dry crust of bread, with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

Proverbs 19.1. Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool. And finally, Proverbs 22.1. A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches and favor is better than silver or gold.

Let's just quickly list all the things that are more important than money. Righteousness, justice, wisdom, insight, humility, peace and quiet, blamelessness, and a good reputation.

All of those are more important than having money. On their face, these Proverbs are prioritizing virtues over wealth, but they are also making some other claims sort of indirectly. First of all, it's interesting.

We're seeing a little bit of an alignment here between poverty and piety and wealth and wickedness. Proverbs does not say that it's wrong to be rich or that the poor are necessarily righteous, but it does raise some questions with these alignments, perhaps about the temptations that the wealthy face.

[20:54] Second, these Proverbs teach that wealth is not everything that it's cracked up to be. A rich person may have a terrible reputation. Great revenue is associated with injustice.

Feasting is associated with fighting. But the poor person, even as he sits at home and nibbles on his crust of bread, enjoys peace and quiet with a clear conscience.

And he is in a much better place. The question is, how can it possibly be true that it's better to be virtuous than it is to be rich? How can that possibly be true?

I mean, from a secular perspective, this sounds like some kind of an opiate or something, right? Some sort of a con job. Something you say to the poor so that they will be content and won't revolt. It's okay to be poor because you can be good. You know, the poor person says, oh, great. Thanks a lot. But for the one who fears the Lord, these virtues are better than wealth because these virtues are so important to God.

[22:03] Wealth is neutral. In some ways, whether you are rich or poor is sort of irrelevant, like how tall you are, where you were born.

But virtues are motivated by the knowledge that there is a God who is watching. He is watching over the affairs of humanity and ensuring justice. And that's why it is so much more important to be virtuous and temporarily deprived than it is to be at odds with God and the target of his retribution. The good life does not come from wealth, but from aligning ourselves with God's truth and taking the long view. We want to set ourselves up for permanent blessing at his hand.

And this is also a reminder that covetousness is a sin. Covetousness and envy are sins if you are rich.

And covetousness and envy are sins if you are poor. In fact, this might be a particular temptation for the poor. It is easy for the poor to look at those houses in that neighborhood or those cars that those people are driving.

[23:11] At those clothes that were purchased at a store that is beyond their reach and think, oh man, that would be the good life. But that is idolatry.

It is a contradiction of what God calls the good life. And if we fear the Lord, if we operate under a different set of values than secular society, that's because we have a different goal in mind, which is God's pleasure.

And if money is not as important as virtue, that means that we can be more free in giving it away. Let's talk about that in a minute. The third thread, reality number three, is because God is the creator, he has a special concern for the poor.

God has a special concern for the poor. Look at Proverbs 17.5. Look over a couple of pages there. Proverbs 17.5. Listen to this very strong verse here.

Whoever mocks the poor insults his maker. He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished. Why would we mock the poor?

[24:17] Well, maybe one reason is because they're fairly easy targets. They're often defenseless. Maybe it makes us feel better about ourselves in some way. But notice it doesn't say here if you oppress the poor, you're in trouble.

It doesn't say if you cheat the poor, God's going to be angry. It says if you insult the poor. Merely insulting them is a deep offense to God. Insulting the poor makes us an enemy of God.

Like picking on a little kid on the playground and then all of a sudden, here comes big brother and you, oops, whoopsie. Or you're out in the woods and there's a little defenseless bear cub and you poke the bear cub with sticks and then here comes the mama bear ready to tear you to shreds. Right? The poor just look defenseless. They're not really defenseless. They only look that way because whoever gloats over them will not go unpunished. We will not get away with that.

Flip over a couple of pages to 22.2. Proverbs 22.2. Sometimes it seems like the rich and the poor don't have very much in common because, again, they drive different cars and they often live on different sides of town.

[25:28] They have different types of jobs. Sometimes they even talk differently or have different amounts of education. Sometimes it seems like they are really quite different. But look at Proverbs 22.2. The rich and poor meet together.

That means they are the same. And the Lord is the maker of them all. As creatures of God, the rich and the poor are equal. A person's value is not determined by how much money they have but because they were made by God.

I have two daughters. I have an older daughter named Lauren and a younger daughter named Kate. And when Kate was born and we brought her home from the hospital, her older sister was two years old and she was really excited to have a baby sister.

She was really interested in her and could not wait until she was a little bit older and they could play together. But as they grew older, there were some inevitable tensions in our home. And I remember a couple of times they would be off on the side of the, one side of the room sort of playing together. And they would maybe start to fight over a toy or something. And they would fight back and forth and tug. And then finally my older daughter Lauren would say, she would get mad. She would say, no, my mommy.

[26:39] We would say. Tracy and I would think, my mommy, what is that, a swear word or something? It was just so strange and so irrelevant. I mean, Tracy wasn't even anywhere near. Then we realized that it was a way that she was trying to assert her dominance.

Right? That she was the one who belonged in this family. Not this new little infiltrator. And so it's hard for us not to laugh because, of course, we love both of our girls.

They both belong in our family. And the irony is that the very thing that Lauren was saying in order to try and establish her dominance was the very thing that undercut that. It was a reminder of the fact that she had no real dominance.

She and Kate were both members of our family. They both have the same mommy. We love them both. And when one of them hurts the other, it hurts us.

God made the poor. And he loves them. And throughout the Bible, God doesn't just say he loves the poor. He says he is especially concerned for the poor.

[27:45] And he watches out for them. So if we fear the Lord, it doesn't matter what secular society says. If we care about what the Lord thinks, then we love the poor too.

If we have some money, if we're in a particular position of influence, then we had better be very careful about the way we treat the poor. To do what is right.

To pay them what we owe. To treat them with dignity because God is watching. They are his people. And so we are deeply motivated to walk carefully and to ensure that the rights of the poor are upheld.

The fourth thread. This is an action thread. We must treat the poor with justice. We must treat the poor with justice. If the poor are particularly vulnerable, thread one.

And if doing what is right is much more important than gaining wealth, thread two. And if, thread three, God is particularly concerned for the poor, then we must treat them with justice. Now the word justice is thrown around a lot these days by various groups, different political groups.

[28:55] And sometimes they have different meanings. But what the Bible means by justice is that people are treated fairly and rightly, that good behavior is rewarded and bad behavior is punished. Laws are followed.

People are treated with respect and dignity without regard for whether they're rich or poor, whether they have resources or not, whether they're powerful or common, without regard for their ethnicity or their background or anything else.

If there's someone who is trying to do what is right, who works hard and provides for his family, and then they are mistreated and hindered in some way, that is not justice. But on the other hand, if someone does what is wrong and steals and refuses to work and lies and is corrupt and treats other people badly, and they do not face the consequences for that, that is not justice either.

Look at Proverbs 13.23. Look at Proverbs 13.23. We'll go back here for thread number four. The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food.

The ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice. This proverb reminds us that sometimes people are poor not because they don't have resources, but because of injustice.

[30:11] When you plant a seed in the soil, it will grow. It doesn't care if you're poor or rich. It doesn't know who planted it. So then why do the poor plant and they have nothing?

It's because the rich or the unjust people come and sweep it away. The injustice takes away the few resources that the poor do have. If someone is being robbed, or if the rules of the economic game keep changing, or if people are taken advantage of in their vulnerability, they aren't going to succeed.

Listen to Proverbs 22.22. We don't have to turn there. Listen to this proverb. Do not rob the poor because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate.

At the gate means in the court of law. That's where in an ancient city you had court. Don't crush the poor in court. Don't use legal proceedings or loopholes or high-powered lawyers to crush the poor. Why? Because it says in the next verse, for the Lord will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them. Ooh. Looks at first like the poor have no protector.

[31:23] They can't afford that high-powered attorney, but they do have a protector. It's the Lord. If you rob the poor, the Lord will begin to do some robbing of his own.

He will rob you of your life. What's particularly shocking about this is that in the ancient world, the Bible is very clear that there is no death penalty for anything involving property values.

There's death penalty for a wide number of sins, but not for crimes involving theft or cheating or property. But yet here, God threatens the oppressor with death if he robs the poor.

From a secular perspective, injustice is wrong because it's an offense against humanity or it's an offense against society or because it denies someone access to something.

But from a biblical perspective, for the one who fears the Lord, these reasons are just weak and thin. It's troubling because God is the maker of them all and injustice is not just a crime or an offense against a person, it's an offense against God as creator.

[32:33] When one of his creatures is corrupt and cheats or steals from another, it is a sin against God who made that person and cares for them. We have an opportunity as Christians to have our sensitive antenna up.

And wherever we go, whether we're teachers at school or employers or people in any sort of influence at work or in the community, we have these sensitive antenna up and we are always looking to sniff out something that isn't right.

We work to identify broken systems and broken laws and to defend the powerless. And some people know they have no advocate in the courts and they have no advocate with the police and they have no advocate with political parties, but they know they have an advocate with Christians because Christians follow God.

Finally, the fifth thread. The fifth thread is we must be generous to the poor. The last thread was negative. We should not show partiality. This thread is positive.

We should be generous to the poor. The poor are vulnerable, so that should evoke our compassion. Character is more important than wealth, so we can give up some of our wealth. God cares for the poor.

[33:46] He is generous to them and He has been generous to us, so we can be generous as well. Let's look quickly at one verse here.

Proverbs 14.31. Proverbs 14.31. Proverbs 14.31. This will be our last verse. It says this, Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.

Whatever is inflicted on a poor person, whether good or bad, is inflicted upon God. If we are generous to the poor, we honor God.

Here we have a straightforward and direct way of bringing God honor by being generous with His special people in need. Proverbs 19.17 says this, just listen, Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord.

Think about that. That implies obligation on His behalf. We lend to Him and He owes us. Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord and God will repay him for his deed.

[34:55] We put God under our obligation when we are generous to the poor. That's a shocking statement. Why should we be generous to the poor? Well, from a secular perspective, I guess it's because we feel guilty for having money or because it helps us make us feel better about ourselves or it brings us some recognition.

Maybe if we own a business or something, we can get some good marketing out of that. But if we fear the Lord, we have a much more serious motivation. We know that God cares deeply about the poor and He wants us to adopt His perspective.

Have you ever heard about this game, Pokemon Go? You know, it's like this augmented reality where it uses the camera on your phone and then as you go outside on the sidewalk or even in your own kitchen, you can see these critters on there, these digital critters, and you try and catch them with a little Pokeball.

Not that I know. Last summer, my family and I went out to the lake and there were just, we went out there on a Saturday, the lakefront was just packed with people playing Pokemon Go.

Some of them even had these extra battery packs in their pocket with a cord so that their phone would last longer. They could catch even more of these little critters. But here's the thing. If you walk along the lake and you don't have your phone out and you don't have that app turned on, did you know if you don't have that on that you could miss the fact that there is a Pikachu right in front of you?

[36:18] Or as you turn the corner around those rocks out there that there is a squirtle just over there in the bushes and you could catch it if you just try hard enough? Yes, those are their real names.

When it comes to the poor though, it's easy, it's tempting to leave our phone turned off. There are people in need all around us that if we're not tuned in, then we are not seeing the needs that are

there.

If we can be on the lookout for Pokemon critters, we can not just come to people who have needs when it is brought to our attention, but be on the lookout for them because we want to be God's generous representatives.

If there is no God and what we see around us is all that there is, then it makes sense for us just to kind of do our own thing, to look out for ourselves.

There really isn't anything more than money, so we should make sure that we get a lot of it because that's the good life. But if there is a God, if there is a God, this God, who reveals himself to us in the Bible, then that kind of life isn't the life that is going to lead to the right place.

[37:33] If there is a God who created the world and has ownership of us and our destinies are in his hand, if he's the one who determines what is important, then we are going to define the good life in a different way.

We want to imitate God and please him. He fights for justice and loves justice of every kind.

He loves to be generous and he has been generous to us. He has not withheld from us his own son. We can be generous too and represent him well in the way that we treat the poor because that is wisdom.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we acknowledge this morning our sin nature that encourages us to think only about ourselves, about our own power and our own influence.

We also acknowledge that we swim in an extremely strong current of culture that is constantly telling us what to think, sometimes explicitly, sometimes in a very subtle way and it is hard.

[38:48] It is hard to do this. It is hard to let go of our money. It is hard to care for other people. We know everything in us fights against this and we confess our weaknesses.

but we also know that we belong to you. You have created us. You have made this world and you have determined how it works and you have purchased us with your death and resurrection and we belong to you.

And so we pray, Lord, that you would renew our minds, transform us to be like your son so that we see the world and our lives and our possessions correctly and act accordingly.

We pray, Lord, that we would forsake ourselves and instead work to bring glory to you. Even in this area. In this area of money and poverty and wisdom.

We need your help and we ask for it now. In Jesus' name. Amen.