

Sermon & Bible Study Guide
World Hunger
October 2006

Sermon Outline
The Ministry of the Open Hand
Emphasis Passage: Deuteronomy 15:10-11
Focal Verse: Verse 11

Context

Deuteronomy is a restatement of the Law that Moses gave to the people a short time before his death. In Deuteronomy 14:22-15:11, Moses addressed the issue of money: the tithe, the forgiveness of debt, and aid to the poor. He made it clear throughout this whole section that the underlying attitude throughout this whole section is to be one of generosity. The Israelites were not to be a tight-fisted people because God had been so generous with them. When they encountered someone in need, they were to give to them willingly even when they knew they would not get anything back. Stinginess would meet with God's disfavor while openhandedness toward the poor and afflicted would result in God's continued generosity toward them.

Introduction

Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines a generous person as someone who is "characterized by a noble or forbearing spirit: animated by or exhibiting high ideals : MAGNANIMOUS, LOFTY, BENEVOLENT, KINDLY . . . LIBERAL OR REFLECTING LIBERALITY IN GIVING" [Philip Babcock Gove, editor, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, Publishers, 1969), 945-946]. In other words, generosity is, first of all, a state of mind and then an act that emanates from it—a definition that fully conforms to the teaching of God's Word.

Christians are to be generous because of the magnanimity and generosity expressed by God toward us in so many ways—especially in giving His Son to redeem us and His Spirit to indwell us and empower us. Christianity is not just a changing of a person's emotions, but also a changing of the mind. In fact, the word "repentance" in the Greek means a change of mind—one that leads to a change of direction. But a person's direction will not change until the mind is transformed (Rom. 12:1-2). Christianity is a complete transformation of a life of self-centeredness to one of God-centeredness and, as a result, others-centeredness.

The question is: how does this all play out in the area of World Hunger? What is to be our response to the needs that we see around us? Though the context of this passage of

Scripture was directed to the Israelites who were under the Law, the principles apply to all.

- I. We are to assist others generously (10, 11). (CC1, CC2, CC3)**
 - A. Giving generously does not mean holding onto what we have, but opening our hand to those in need (v. 8). (WS7, WS8, CC4)
 - B. Giving generously to others is the same as giving to the Lord (Matt. 25:35-44).
 - C. Giving generously to others will be rewarded, though that should not be our motivation in giving (Luke 6:38).
 - D. We are to give expecting nothing in return (v. 9).

- II. We are to assist others with the right attitude (10). (WS7, WS8, CC5, CC6, CC7)**
 - A. Two attitudes work against open-handed giving: hard-heartedness and tight-fistedness (v. 7).
 - B. Giving, if done out of a “stingy heart,” will not be blessed by God.
 - C. Giving with the right attitude is illustrated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.
 - 1. He says the Macedonians gave even when they were in “deep poverty” themselves.
 - 2. They begged Paul to allow them to give. That’s giving with the right attitude.

- III. We are to assist others because needs are always present (11). (WS1, WS2, WS3, WS9, WS10, WS11, WS12, CC5, CC8)**
 - A. Jesus reminded us that there would always be poor people (Matt. 26:11).
 - B. Every generation has its poor people. Though some create their own poverty by their actions, many are poor through no control of their own.
 - C. The earthquakes, hurricanes, and the tsunami in Southeast Asia over the last two years have reduced hundreds of thousands, if not millions, to poverty beyond their control.
 - D. It has recently been estimated that the recovery of the Gulf Coast region alone may take 25 years.
 - E. Those people must have physical, as well as monetary, assistance. Disaster Relief teams will be needed for a long time to come.

- IV. We are to assist others because God commands it (11b). (WS4, WS5, WS6, CC9)**
 - A. God says we “must willingly open [our] hand” to those who are afflicted and poor.
 - B. His words are not optional—they are a command to be obeyed.
 - C. God repeatedly commanded that those in need be provided for (Lev. 19:10, 33; 23:22; 25:35-38; Deut. 24:14, 19-21).

- D. The implication of Jesus' words in Matthew 25:35-44 is that those commands are still applicable to us today.

Conclusion

We have all seen the devastation caused by the catastrophic weather conditions in this country and around the world in the last couple of years. The pictures have been burned into our minds as we've watched the news coverage of these terrible tragedies. The upshot of all this is that there may be more need now than at any other time. We have seen Southern Baptists respond to those needs through Disaster Relief work. But the work is not over. It will take not only manpower but financial help to meet those needs along with many others not even related to those tragedies. There will always be needs that we must respond to. The question is: will we do it?

WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

1. Pray for those who minister among the hungry.
2. Learn about Southern Baptist hunger ministries in your area and link with them.
3. Involve your family and neighbors in hunger ministry activities.
4. Promote Southern Baptist World Hunger Fund giving in your church.
5. Train and volunteer to work in Disaster Relief.

Resources

The Ministry of the Open Hand

Emphasis Passage: Deuteronomy 15:10-11
Focal Verse: Verse 11

Bible Translations

Holman Christian Standard: “Give to him, and don’t have a stingy heart when you give, and because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you do. For there will never cease to be poor people in the land; that is why I am commanding you, ‘You must willingly open your hand to your afflicted and poor brother in your land.’”

King James Version: Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

New King James Version: “You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’”

New International Version: Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

New American Standard: “You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. For the poor will never cease *to be* in the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’”

New Living Translation: “Give freely without begrudging it, and the LORD your God will bless you in everything you do. There will always be some among you who are poor. That is why I am commanding you to share your resources freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need.”

The Message: Give freely and spontaneously. Don’t have a stingy heart. The way you handle matters like this triggers God, your God’s, blessing in everything you do, all your work and ventures. There are always going to be poor and needy people among you. So I

command you: Always be generous, open purse and hands, give to your neighbors in trouble, your poor and hurting neighbors.

Other Helpful Scriptures

Bible verses about World Hunger:

Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Deuteronomy 24:19-21; Psalm 41:1-3;
Proverbs 14:21b; Proverbs 19:17; Proverbs 21:13; Proverbs 22:9; Proverbs 28:27;
Isaiah 58:7-11; Matthew 25:35-46; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Hebrews 6:10; James 2:15-17;
1 John 3:17-18

Word Studies (WS)

WS1—poor (first occurrence)—“from <H14> ('abah), in the sense of *want* (especially in feeling); *destitute* :- beggar, needy, poor (man)” [*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS2—poor (first occurrence)—“This word also occurs in Ugaritic and Ethiopic. Biblical Hebrew attests it about 60 times (33 times in the Psalms alone) and in all periods. This noun refers, first, to someone who is poor in a material sense. Such a one may have lost the land of his inheritance: ‘But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat’ (Exod. 23:11). He has come into difficult financial straits (Job 30:25) and perhaps lacks clothing (Job 31:19) or food (Psa. 132:15). Secondly, *'ebyôn* may refer to the lack of social standing which causes a need for protection. The first biblical occurrence bears this emphasis. God guarantees protection for such a one: ‘Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause’ (Exod. 23:6). The godly man defends the needy and defenseless: ‘I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out’ (Job 29:16; cf. Prov. 31:9; Rom. 3:14-15). Divine provisions are encased in the Mosaic stipulations such as the seventh-year reversion of ancestral hereditary lands (Exod. 23:11), cancellation of loans (Deut. 15:4), and special extension of loans (Deut. 15:7, 9, 11). Thirdly, this noun sometimes describes one’s spiritual condition before God: ‘Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes’ (Amos 2:6). In this verse *'ebyôn* is in synonymous parallelism to ‘righteous,’ which means that it describes a moral quality” [*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS3—poor (first occurrence)—“*'ebyôn*. **One in the state of wanting, a needy or poor person.** The etymology is uncertain. ASV and RSV translate similarly. *'ebyôn* emphasizes ‘need’ and thus is to be distinguished from *'onî* ‘afflicted,’ *dal* ‘poor,’ and

rāsh ‘weak’ (the Qal participle of *rīsh* ‘destitute’). This noun has a questionable connection with Ugaritic *’byn(t)*. Some scholars say *’ebyôn* is of Egyptian derivation (Paul Humbert, *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions*, 32. 1, pp. 1-6), and others of general Semitic derivation (G. J. Botterweck, ‘*’ebyôn,*’ in *.TDOT*, I, pp. 27-41).

“The *’ebyôn* is poor in a material sense. He may have lost his ancestral land (Exodus 23:11). It may be that he has reverted to borrowing (Deut. 15:7, 9, 11). He may be the recipient of special gifts on Purim (Esther 9:22). He may be without clothing (Job 31:19) or lacking food (Psalm 132:15). Certainly, used in this sense of material want the ‘poor’ is one who has fallen on hard times (Job 30:25)” [*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS4—command—“a primitive root; (intensive) to *constitute, enjoin* :- appoint, (for-) bid, (give a) charge, (give a, give in, send with) command (-er, -ment), send a messenger, put, (set) in order” [*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS5—command—“A verb meaning to order, to direct, to appoint, to command, to charge, to be ordered, to be commanded. The word means to give an order or to command, to direct someone; it indicates commands given to people in various situations. The Lord commanded Adam and Eve to eat from certain trees but to refrain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16; 3:17). He ordered Moses hundreds of times to do or say certain things as He established Israel’s worship, feasts, festivals, and rituals (Ex. 7:2; 16:34; Num. 15:23). Israel was to keep all the directives the Lord gave them (Deut. 4:2; 1 Ki. 11:10). The Lord commanded His prophets to speak (Amos 6:11; Nah. 1:14; Zech. 1:6). People gave orders to others as well, as when Pharaoh ordered that all newborn Hebrew males should be drowned in the Nile River (Ex. 1:22). Deborah ordered Barak to defeat Sisera (Judg. 4:6). Abraham ordered his family to follow the ways of the Lord (Gen. 18:19). Kings commanded their people (1 Ki. 5:17[31]; Jer. 36:26). Priests in Israel gave directives to the people about what to do under certain circumstances (Lev. 9:6; cf. Lev. 13:58). A person who was chosen for a task or position was commanded concerning his responsibilities by the priestly authorities (Num. 27:19, 23). The word may mean to give directives or to set in order as when the Lord told Hezekiah to order—that is, to set things in order, in his household, for he was about to die (2 Ki. 20:1)” [*The Complete Word Study Dictionary* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS6—command—“What God commands to be done, he provides the means to accomplish, e.g. he instructed Moses concerning the building of the cultic furniture and buildings; then he inspired Bezalel and Oholiab with the Spirit of wisdom to be able to accomplish the work (Exodus 31:2-6; Exodus 35:30-36:1). Regarding the making of these objects the text first details the instructions and then describes Israel’s careful fulfillment of God’s commandment (Exodus 25-30; Exodus 36-39; Leviticus 8; cf. Exodus 39:5, 7, 32, 42f.).

“God insures the truth of his word by commanding it; he commanded the covenant (Psalm 105:8; Psalm 111:9) and will command blessing to those faithful to the covenant

(Deut. 28:8; Psalm 133:3). God remembers what he has commanded and is careful to fulfill every part of his side of the command decreed (1 Chron. 16:15).

“Blessing accompanies obedience to God's commands; rebellion, however brings curses (Deut. 11:26ff.). Adam and Eve disobeyed and encountered curses (Genesis 3:16-19). In contrast, God commanded Noah to build an ark; Noah did all that God commanded and survived the flood (Genesis 6:22; Genesis 7:5). Israel obeyed the commands of God at the Exodus, particularly regarding the Passover, and they escaped their enslavement (cf. Exodus 12:28, 50). But unfortunately Israel was prone to leave the way God directed (cf. Deut. 31:29). To follow his commandments results in a good and long life (Deut. 5:33). Therefore, Israel was not to deviate to the right or to the left from what God commanded them (Deut. 5:32). Obedience to God's command becomes the obedient one's righteousness (Deut. 6:25)” [*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS7—open—“a primitive root; to *open* wide (literal or figurative); specifically to *loosen, begin, plough, carve* :- appear, break forth, draw (out), let go free, (en-) grave (-n), loose (self), (be, be set) open (-ing), put off, ungird, unstop, have vent” [*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS8—open—“A verb meaning to open, to loosen. It is used to indicate the opening of many things: figuratively, the windows of heaven (Gen. 7:11, 8:6); storehouses opened to distribute grain (Gen. 41:56); a grave (Ezek. 37:12, 13); a cistern (Ex. 21:33); a mouth of a cave (Josh. 10:22); a letter (Neh. 6:5); one's hand (Ps. 104:28)” [*The Complete Word Study Dictionary* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS9—poor (second occurrence)—“from <H6031> (‘anah); *depressed*, in mind or circumstances [practically the same as <H6035> (‘anav), although the margin constantly disputes this, making <H6035> (‘anav) subjective and <H6041> (‘aniy) objective] :- afflicted, humble, lowly, needy, poor” [*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS10—poor (second occurrence)—“An adjective meaning poor, afflicted. It refers to those who are suffering, in a state of poverty, oppression, misery from various causes: from being poor, needy (Ex. 22:25); unfortunate, in want (Deut. 24:15; 2 Sam. 22:28; Job 24:4). They cry out for help and for their needs (Ps. 9:12 [13]; 12:5 [6]; 37:14). Hope for deliverance is from the Lord (Ps. 69:29 [30]) who dispenses grace (Prov. 3:34; 14:21). They are constantly abused by rich and oppressive leaders (Isa. 3:14; Amos 8:4; Hab. 3:14). God had commanded His people not to oppress the poor (Zech. 7:10); for their true King is humble Himself (Zech. 9:9)” [*The Complete Word Study Dictionary* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS11—poor (second occurrence)—“**Poor, weak, afflicted, humble.** The ‘ānî is primarily a person suffering some kind of disability or distress. (Gray, G. B., *Isaiah*, ICC, I, p. 310).

“The *‘ānî*, although frequently in synonymous parallelism with *‘ebyôn* and *dal*, differs from both in that it connotes some kind of disability or distress. In Deut. 24:14-15 the hired servant is described as *‘ebyôn* and *‘ānî*. Israel is told not to oppress their hired servant by withholding the wages due him because he is *‘ānî*. Furthermore, if he is oppressed he may call on God his defender. We see that financially the *‘ānî* lives from day to day, and that socially he is defenseless and subject to oppression. Consequently, this word is used frequently in connection with *‘enyôn* expressing the difficulty accompanying a lack of material possessions. The people are commanded to give alms to the *‘ānî* under sanction of God's blessing (Deut. 15:11). God instructs his people to grant loans to the *‘ānî* of Israel even when they have only their outer garment as collateral or pledge (see *‘ābaṭ*) and not to further afflict them by keeping that garment overnight because the *‘ānî* would need it to keep warm (Exodus 22:25-26), for it was his only outer garment. In Leviticus 19:10 the *‘ānî* is classed with the stranger as having a right to the gleanings of the field. *‘ānî* is distinguished from *dal* (the poor) in Proverbs 22:22, ‘Rob not the poor (*dal*) for he is poor (*dal*), neither oppress the afflicted (*‘ānî*) in the gate.’ God is set forth as the protector and deliverer of the afflicted, and he enjoins his people to be the same. So the one who complies is considered godly (Ezekiel 18:17), while those who do not are considered ungodly (Job 24:9; Proverbs 14:21; Isaiah 58:7)” [*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

WS12—poor (second occurrence)—“‘poor; weak; afflicted; humble.’ This word, which also appears in early Aramaic and post-biblical Hebrew, occurs in biblical Hebrew about 76 times and in all periods. This noun is frequently used in synonymous parallelism with *‘ebyôn* (‘needy’) and/or *dal* (‘poor’). It differs from both in emphasizing some kind of disability or distress. A hired servant as one who is in a lower (oppressive) social and material condition is described both as an *‘ebyôn* and *‘ānî*. ‘Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee’ (Deut. 24:14-15). If wrongly oppressed, he can call on God for defense. Financially, the *‘ānî* lives from day to day and is socially defenseless, being subject to oppression. In its first biblical occurrence the *‘ānî* is guaranteed (if men obey God's law) his outer garment for warmth at night even though that garment might be held as collateral during the day: ‘If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a userer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury’ (Exod. 22:25). The godly protect and deliver the ‘afflicted’ (Isa. 10:2; Ezek. 18:17), while the ungodly take advantage of them, increasing their oppressed condition (Isa. 58:7). The king is especially charged to protect the *‘ānî*: ‘Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy’ (Prov. 31:9)” [*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

Commentary Citations (CC)

CC1—“Warmth and generosity were to characterize the Israelites in the attitude toward the poor in their community. It was not the letter of the Law that was important but a humanitarian spirit and a proper attitude, softness of heart and openness of hand. A charitable attitude, not charity in the sense of almsgiving, is to prevail in lending to the poor. By responding to the request from the poor in a legalistic attitude fearing that he might not be able to repay before the year of cancellation, the Israelite might deprive the poor of what he actually needed. God’s people were to ‘give generously’ and ‘without a grudging heart.’ As such, God wanted to bless and enrich his people” [_____, *Deuteronomy, The Complete Biblical Library* (Springfield, MO: World Library Press, Inc., 1996), 163].

CC2—“The other feature most noticeable in the instruction about the treatment of the poor and of released bond slaves is *the call for liberality and generous giving*. The hand is to be open to the poor brother or sister. You must loan whatever your poor brother or sister needs. You are to give liberally (vv. 10 and 14) out of flocks, grain, and wine. The literal expression in verse 14 is ‘You shall make a rich necklace for him (or her—the law explicitly refers to females as well as males; cf. v. 12) out of your flocks, threshing floor, and your wine press.’ That is, you shall richly load her with products from all your personal resources. The released bond slave is to be given the means of establishing a place in society again. A generous spirit and generous deeds, therefore, are what is required in the face of poverty and hardship, not a grudging, reluctant, half-hearted response” [Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 137-138].

CC3—“Judging from the accumulated experience of the far-reaching past there will be poor among us so long as this present dispensation shall continue. No schemes, however philanthropic, no theories, however elaborate, will rid the world of the poor. Our blessed Lord Himself recognized poverty as a social fact, not to be deprecated, not to be urged as an argument against the existence of a benevolent Supreme Being, not to be pointed to as a grave defect in His system, but as what might be called ‘a standing order,’ not without its justification and appointed end: ‘Ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good.’

“The contrast between wealth and poverty, the apparent advantages one class enjoys over another, the inequalities of social life, the yawning gulf which seems hopelessly or unfairly to separate Dives from Lazarus in our congested cities or rural districts, the wealth of Belgravia and the destitution of Bethnal Green, the lordly mansions in the midst of extensive parks towering over the modest dwellings of the agricultural labourers, are contrasts that have existed since civilized life first began, and exist in their measure even where life is not yet civilized. But, whether under the thoughtful Mosaic system, or under that of Him who came ‘not to destroy but to fulfil,’ such contrasts were not to be made occasions of unreasoning complaint, incentives to anarchism, or good and sufficient excuse for setting class against class, and widening the breach between them. In vain does the political agitator or social incendiary search the Scriptures for texts which, honestly interpreted, justify those outrages which only forfeit sympathy, or for anything which warrants extreme measures purely on the ground of these marked contrasts and inequalities. What is more evident and confessed than the varied and

diverse distribution of God's gifts and endowments in creation? It does not appear that the thought and purpose of God is of 'levelling up,' of a complete effacement of social inequalities, of Communism as preached by some, or of Socialism as advocated by others, but such a view of these contrasts as shall give scope and room for our purest sympathies, shall encourage mutual consideration, and shall be the corrective of thoughtless selfishness" [James Hastings, "The Books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges and Ruth" in *The Speaker's Bible* (Aberdeen: The 'Speaker's Bible' Offices, 1924), 114-115].

CC4—"In this paragraph, Moses teaches that helping the poor is a heart issue because it is a financial one. Three times he speaks of an open heart's resulting in an open hand (vv. 7-8, 10, 11). Matthew Henry said, 'If the hand is shut it is a sign that the heart is hardened.'

"The heart or attitude is a steady theme throughout Deuteronomy. It is interesting that a book known for its treatment of law should continually emphasize the heart. Moses warns the children of Israel about the dangers of a proud heart that lifts self above God (Deut. 8:11-20). In 9:4 he says, 'Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, "Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land."'"

"Although this section deals with loaning to the poor rather than giving, the attitude plays a prominent place because of the year of release. A potential creditor might be unwilling to make a loan to a poor person if the year of release were coming very soon. If a loan were requested in the latter part of Israel's sixth year, the loan could not be recalled during the seventh and, in essence, the loan would be a gift. Because the poor always had needs, it would be inevitable that some would need financial assistance just before the year of release. Therefore, a loan to the poor during the sixth year meant the creditor would not be able to collect it. To avoid an unwillingness by the wealthy to lend money at that time, Moses appeals for a generous attitude. By acting generously, the people will experience God's blessing and will prosper (v. 10).

"The main points of this paragraph are: (1) The poor will continually be needing help from the wealthy (v. 11). (2) These needs are to be generously and gladly met (v. 10). (3) The desire to evade any obligation is a wicked violation of the spirit of the law (v. 9). (4) The cry of the neglected and oppressed will rise up to God and be heard (v. 9). The Lord will bless those whose hearts and hands are open to the needy (v. 10).

"The treatment of the less fortunate is also dealt with in the New Testament. Matthew 25:31-46 gives us the strong words of Jesus on this subject. Our Lord assures us that 'inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me' (v. 40). Paul applies this truth when he says, 'Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. . . . Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith' (Gal. 6:2, 10)" [John C. Maxwell, *Deuteronomy, The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 209-210].

CC5—"God is generous, and so should Israel give generously. Stinginess is unbecoming a person who professes to know the one who owns all the resources of heaven (cp. Ps. 50:10). A grudging heart should not be found in a people so blessed as Israel had been, especially since God was promising still further blessings for obedience: Because of this

the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

“Since poverty is sometimes connected with uncontrollable events, and since unredeemed humanity is selfish by nature, Moses noted that there would always be poor people in the land (cp. Mark 14:7). Because anyone might be affected, Israel was always to be openhanded toward their kinsmen specifically and toward the poor and needy generally” [Doug McIntosh, *Deuteronomy in Holman Old Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 191].

CC6—“Having addressed the matter of debt cancellation and the theoretical possibility of there being no poverty in the land of promise, Moses shifted the emphasis to the practical reality of poverty and how the more affluent in society must deal with it. Granted the existence of the poor, the attitude toward them must be one of softness of heart and openness of hand (vv. 7-8). That is, true charity consists of compassion at work. The real test of commitment to this principle would be the brother who asked for help at the last hour, just before the time of debt cancellation or suspension of payment came about (v. 9a). To lend to him then would likely be tantamount to making him an outright gift inasmuch as he would have little or no time left to pay back the loan. In such circumstances the tendency would be not to make a loan at all and to let the needy brother go unsatisfied . . . Such a response, however, is not at all appropriate for a kingdom citizen. Not only might the offended and neglected brother make appeal to the Lord, who is concerned about the plight of all his people (v. 9b), but the very attitude of stinginess is unbecoming to one who claims to be a servant of the Lord. Rather, one should give freely (so the info abs. of the verb *nāthan*, v. 10a) not grudgingly, for this is what delights the Lord and prompts him to respond in like manner with blessing and prosperity (v. 10). In the real world of fallen humanity there will always be the poor (v. 11a), but there must also always be, among God’s people, a spirit of generosity to them (v. 11b). Jesus himself made note of this when he commended the woman with the precious ointment for having used it to anoint him in view of his impending death and burial (Matt 26:6-13). The poor about whom his hypocritical detractors professed to be concerned would always be with them, he said. They would have ample opportunity to unleash their compassion and largess upon them if they so desired” [Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy, New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 244-245].

CC7—“The writer passes from the exactness of legal expression to an urgent appeal to Israel to treat the poor at all times with an open hand and an open heart (7, 8, 10). While the law required that debtors should be released from their obligations every seventh year, love demanded nothing less than a continual attitude of generosity and mercy towards the poor. The letter killed, but the spirit gave life. The absence of compassion would lead men to the degrading reaction described in verse 9 and a law that was designed to protect the poor would become a reason for oppressing them. As the seventh year approached men of wealth would hesitate to make loans which would not be reimbursed. To lend a poor man something in the sixth year was practically to make him a gift. But it was precisely a gift of this kind that was being asked of Israel. Here was the affirmation of a great principle which found expression in other words in the New

Testament centuries later (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 14:12-14; 2 Cor. 9:7). These verses anticipate the Sermon on the Mount because they penetrate behind the outward act to the motives and intents of the heart. Obedience towards God inevitably issues in generosity towards one's fellows. Indeed, in 1 John 3:17 hardness of heart is reckoned as a denial of every profession that the love of God abides in a man's heart. A mean and grudging spirit which provokes a cry of distress from a poor man is sinful in God's sight and merits divine condemnation. On the other hand, Yahweh never fails to respond in blessing to a happy and generous giver" [J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 188].

CC8—"A word needs to be said about verse 11, a verse that appears on the lips of Jesus (Matt. 6:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8) and is sometimes taken as an excuse for ignoring the poor: that is, that there is always going to be poverty. That, of course, is exactly the opposite of what this text says. For one thing, verse 11a should be translated, 'For the poor will never cease *off the earth*.' As verse 4 has indicated, in a land enriched by God's blessing and filled with those who obey the Lord's instruction, there will be no poor. That word is to be taken seriously. Equally serious and realistic is the awareness that such conditions do not operate throughout the world. Deuteronomy shows the way it should be even as it acknowledges the human reality. The manual for life on the land that is the Book of Deuteronomy is precisely to prescribe a way of life in community that provides for all and gives security to the whole. If it is at all utopian, it is also the way things are meant to be in God's intention.

"In any event the implication to be drawn from the fact of continued poverty is clearly stated here and reiterated by Jesus: Open your hand wide to the poor (v. 1b) and do good to them (Mark 14:7) . . . The existence of poor brothers and sisters is not a basis for acquiescence in the way things are. It is a call to generosity a liberality consonant with the blessing one has received" [Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 137-138].

CC9—"Of so much importance is this kindness to the poor for Christ's sake to be reckoned by us, that we are to watch for and seize opportunities of doing 'good unto all men, specially to them that are of the household of faith;' yea, so labouring, we are even to support the weak, recalling those priceless words which an apostle was mercifully led to save from the peril of unrecorded sayings, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Whenever and wherever there is presented to us a case of genuine need, there is an opportunity for honouring our Saviour which we must not suffer to pass by unimproved . . . There are New Testament warnings against the neglect of the poor, which are not only not less severe than any in the Old Testament—they are even more so. We may arrange them in three classes, giving one specimen under each. (1) 1 John iii. 17: If a man can knowingly neglect the poor, God's love is not in his heart. Where love dwells in the heart, there will be corresponding words on the tongue, and corresponding blessings in the hand. (2) Jas. ii. 5-9; v. 1-4: The Apostle James declares that to neglect or despise the poor is sin against God; and that the cries of oppressed poverty will be heard in heaven. (3) Matt. xxv. 31-46: Our Lord has explicitly told us that in the day of judgment, the one test which will be applied to men, and by which their destiny will be decided, will be that of kindness to the poor for his sake! Where that has been, penitence and faith have

wrought out in love. Where that has not been, there has been no love, and, consequently, neither faith nor penitent obedience” [H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *Deuteronomy in The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 257-258].

CC10—“**For the poor shall never cease out of the land**—To this passage our Lord appears to allude Mark 14:7: For ye have the poor with you always. God leaves these in mercy among men to exercise the feelings of compassion, tenderness, mercy, etc. And without occasions afforded to exercise these, man would soon become a Stoic or a brute” [Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 3* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

CC11—“It is a dreadful thing to have the cry of the poor justly against us. Grudge not a kindness to thy brother; distrust not the providence of God. What thou doest, do freely, for God loves a cheerful giver” (Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Concise Commentary* (Austin, TX: WORDSearch 7 Electronic version, WORDSearch Corp., 2004)].

Bible Study Guide

The Ministry of the Open Hand

Emphasis Passage: Deuteronomy 15:10-11

Focal Verse: Verse 11

This is a suggested Bible study for any size group. The accompanying sermon notes, fact sheet, and PowerPoint presentation serve as resources as you prepare to lead this Bible study. Answers are provided with the questions when appropriate, but do not be too quick to give the answers. Allow the participants time to talk about the questions among themselves and offer their own thoughts and reflections.

Before class: Gather any illustrative material from the fact sheet or other sources that will supplement the points of this lesson.

Create Learning Readiness: Before class members arrive, write the words “generous” and “generosity” on the board.

Ask: Looking at the two words I’ve written on the board, what do you think of when you encounter those words? How would you describe someone who is generous?

Say: *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* defines a generous person as someone who is “characterized by a noble or forbearing spirit: animated by or exhibiting high ideals : MAGNANIMOUS, LOFTY, BENEVOLENT, KINDLY . . . LIBERAL OR REFLECTING LIBERALITY IN GIVING” [Philip Babcock Gove, editor, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, Publishers, 1969), 945-946]. In other words, generosity is, first of all, a state of mind and then an act that emanates from it—a definition that fully conforms to the teaching of God’s Word.

Christians are to be generous because of the magnanimity and generosity expressed by God toward us in so many ways—especially in giving His Son to redeem us and His Spirit to indwell us and empower us. Christianity is not just a changing of a person’s emotions, but also a changing of the mind. In fact, the word “repentance” in the Greek means a change of mind—one that leads to a change of direction. But a person’s direction will not change until the mind is transformed (Rom. 12:1-2). Christianity is a complete transformation of a life of self-centeredness to one of God-centeredness and, as a result, others-centeredness.

The question is: how does this all play out in the area of World Hunger? What is to be our response to the needs that we see around us? Though this passage of Scripture was directed to the Israelites who were under the Law, the principles apply to each of us today.

Say: There are at least four truths in Deuteronomy 15:10-11 that will help us understand what it means to be generous in regard to those in our city, our nation, and our world who are hungry. The first truth that we see here is that we are to assist others generously (10, 11). (See **CC1**, **CC2**, and **CC3** for supplemental information.)

Ask: Looking back at verse 8, what does Moses say our response to the needs of others should be?

Say: This passage related primarily to the lending of money to fellow Hebrews. Once every seven years, all debts were cancelled or released. Some would not lend money to another person if the year of release was fast approaching, knowing that the other person probably wouldn't be able to repay before that time and the money would be lost. (See **WS7**, **WS8**, and **CC4** for supplemental information.)

Ask: But what does God say in verse 9 about that kind of attitude? (They were to give expecting nothing in return.) Do you think God would still say that to us today?

Ask someone to look up and read aloud Luke 6:38.

Say: God generously rewards those who give. However, that should never be our motivation for giving.

Say: Let's look at one other passage that speaks of giving generously to others—Matthew 25:35-44. Let's all turn to that passage. (Ask someone to read the passage aloud.)

Ask: What does this passage say to us about giving to those in need? (It is the same as giving to the Lord.)

Say: Let's turn now to the second truth in the Deuteronomy passage. We are to assist others with the right attitude (10). (See **WS7**, **WS8**, **CC5**, **CC6**, and **CC7** for supplemental information.)

Ask: The first part of verse 10 refers to a "stingy heart." Looking back at verse 7, what two attitudes underlie that stinginess? (hard-heartedness and tight-fistedness) What are some common expressions of those two attitudes?

Say: Giving with the right attitude is illustrated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Let's all turn there. (Ask someone to read the passage aloud.)

Ask: What was the material condition of the people of Macedonia? (deep poverty) What does verse 4 say they did in spite of their poverty?

Say: The question that we should be asking ourselves right now is: have I ever begged for the privilege of giving to someone in need and, if not, why not? That would shed new light on our underlying attitude and motivation, wouldn't it?

Say: Truth number three is that we are to assist others because needs are always present (11a). (See **WS1**, **WS2**, **WS3**, **WS9**, **WS10**, **WS11**, **WS12**, **CC5**, and **CC8** for supplemental information.)

Say: Jesus reminded us that there would always be poor people. (Ask someone to read Matthew 26:11 for the class.) Every generation has its poor people. Though some create their own poverty, many are poor through no control of their own.

Ask: Can you think of any events over the last two years that have reduced many people to poverty level—something over which they had no control? (hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunami, etc.)

Say: There were news reports in April of this year that the recovery in the Gulf Coast region alone might take 25 years.

Ask: What do you think our response to that kind of information ought to be? What could be done?

Ask: Is anyone here familiar with Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams? (If anyone has been on a disaster relief trip, ask them to share briefly about their experience.) Note: information about Disaster Relief work can be found in the fact sheet. Individual stories detailing what some teams have done can be found through Baptist Press (www.bpnews.net).

Say: The fourth truth found in the Deuteronomy passage is that we are to assist others because God commands it (11b). (See **WS4**, **WS5**, **WS6**, and **CC9** for supplemental information.) He says we must open our hand to those in need.

Ask: How does He say we must open our hand? (willingly) This comes back once again to our attitude, doesn't it?

Say: God repeatedly admonished the nation of Israel to provide for those in need, both Hebrews and Gentiles (Lev. 19:10, 33; 23:22; 25:35-38; Deut. 24:14, 19-21). (As time allows, ask group participants to read some of these to demonstrate what God said.)

Ask: Do you remember that we looked at Matthew 25:33-44 earlier? What is the implication of that passage for us today in regard to those in need?

Ask: Giving our money to help those in need is a good thing. But what else could we do? (After response time, share the following points if not already made:

1. Pray for those who minister among the hungry.
2. Learn about Southern Baptist hunger ministries in your area and link with them.
3. Involve your family and neighbors in hunger ministry activities.
4. Promote Southern Baptist World Hunger Fund giving in the church.
5. Train and volunteer to work in Disaster Relief.)