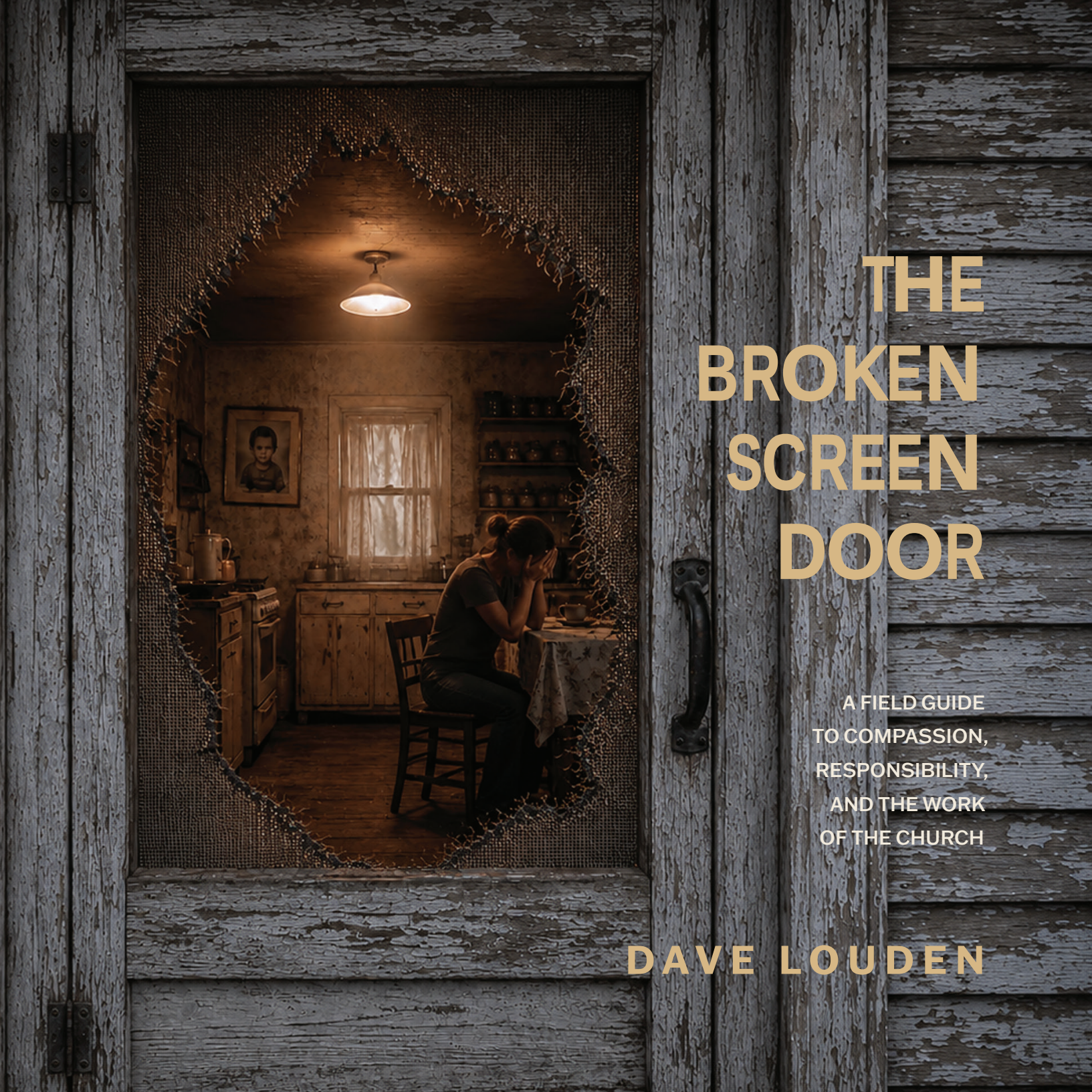


The image is a book cover. The background is a photograph of a woman sitting at a small table in a rustic, dimly lit kitchen. She is looking down with her hands on her face, appearing distressed or sad. The kitchen has wooden cabinets, a window with curtains, and a framed picture of a child on the wall. A single light bulb hangs from the ceiling. The scene is viewed through a broken, peeling wooden screen door. The title 'THE BROKEN SCREEN DOOR' is written in large, bold, yellow capital letters on the right side of the cover. Below the title, the subtitle 'A FIELD GUIDE TO COMPASSION, RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE WORK OF THE CHURCH' is written in smaller, white capital letters. At the bottom right, the author's name 'DAVE LOUDEN' is written in large, bold, yellow capital letters.

THE BROKEN SCREEN DOOR

A FIELD GUIDE
TO COMPASSION,
RESPONSIBILITY,
AND THE WORK
OF THE CHURCH

DAVE LOUDEN

A detailed illustration in a dark, monochromatic style. A man in a jacket and jeans walks away from the viewer on a dirt path. To his left is the rear of a car. To his right is a wooden porch with a rocking chair. The background shows a vast, flat landscape under a cloudy sky, with tree branches hanging down from the top left.

THIS BOOKLET is an attempt to share what I have discovered and what continues to burden my heart. Poverty is not only material. It can touch spirit, soul, and body. My hope is to consider how we might respond to people in need with compassion, wisdom, responsibility, and tangible care.

Scripture taken from NKJV Thomas Nelson Publishing. Copyright 1984

So much pain can exist behind an ordinary front door.

It began as an ordinary day, but before it was over, something would happen that would stay with me. I was visiting a young woman in her home. During our conversation, this young mother glanced toward a picture of a baby on the wall. Then she looked back at me and asked, “Why did God let my baby die?”

That moment still presses on my mind and heart. Here was a broken-hearted mother carrying a grief I could not fix, while around her were practical needs I could see—including a deteriorating screen door we could not close when we left. Walking back to my car, I began asking a larger question –

What lies beneath the poverty and suffering we encounter, and what might faithful, practical help actually look like?

Shared Struggles and Hardships

The young mother's question and the broken screen door are only one example. Countless people live with hardship, grief, and needs that are easy for the rest of us to overlook. Having witnessed some of these struggles firsthand, and having known struggles of my own, I have become increasingly aware of how much pain can exist behind an ordinary front door. Our shared humanity should move us toward compassion rather than distance.

What might that compassion look like in practice? Sometimes it is a meal, transportation, a repair, financial help, or simply the willingness to listen. Small acts can matter greatly when someone is in crisis. When we learn to notice and respond to the needs around us, we remind people that they are not alone—and we begin strengthening the bonds of a neighborhood and community.

Have We Missed Something?

Ephesians 4 presents leaders as those who equip the saints for the work of ministry. That raises an important question for us: Have some of our church structures unintentionally encouraged believers to see ministry primarily as the work of pastors and other leaders? If so, what would it look like to recover a fuller vision in which every member recognizes that he or she has something to contribute?

AND HE HIMSELF GAVE some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

1 Pe 4:10; 1 Cor 14:24-26 – these passages describe active participation by believers rather than a gathering made up primarily of spectators.

If that picture is important, then equipping believers for the work of ministry – including caring for neighbors in need—must become more than an idea. It must become part of the ordinary life of the church.

Could our familiar patterns of church life sometimes make this harder than we realize? That is a question worth considering honestly, not to condemn the church, but to ask whether our practices are helping believers become active participants in the work of ministry.

Being Equipped

How might we begin? Often we already possess resources we no longer use. A garage sale or an online marketplace can turn unused belongings into money that meets an immediate need. The point is not the particular method; it is learning to prepare intentionally so that when a need appears, we are ready to respond.

Helping others also brings a kind of blessing money cannot purchase. Everyone faces difficult seasons. Yet our culture can leave us isolated from one another, and isolation makes it easier to miss both the needs around us and the joy that can come from helping meet them.

Many times, the blessing of giving assistance requires little or no additional financial cost, but rather a simple act of kindness. By sharing what we have, we not only ease the burdens of others, but also enrich our own lives.

All of us need encouragement when life is difficult. Many people quietly feel alone. A friendly hello, a warm smile, a listening ear, or a practical act of care can carry more weight than we realize. James 2:8 calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. For me, that command became connected to a grieving mother and a broken screen door.

Sometimes loving our neighbor really can be as ordinary as repairing a screen door. At other times it may mean walking beside someone through a longer struggle. Either way, the question becomes: What do I have, and how might I use it to offer a timely hand up?

The following pages offer a framework for thinking about that question. The goal is not to place an impossible burden on the giver, but to help us respond with wisdom rather than guilt or fear—and, where possible, with joy.

Drilling Down

For decades I have wrestled with how to understand and apply Scripture's call to care for people in need. I have heard many arguments about when we should help, how much we should help, and whether our help sometimes creates unintended consequences. Beneath those debates, however, Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to generosity with what they actually have.

Deuteronomy 15 became especially important to me. It holds together two ideas that can seem difficult to reconcile: the possibility of a community in which poverty is overcome, and the continuing command to open our hands to the poor. That tension deserves careful attention.

Conditions

Deuteronomy 15: 4-6 “...except when there be no poor among you; for the LORD will greatly bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance—only if you carefully obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today. For the LORD your God will bless you just as He promised; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they will not reign over you.”

Yet the same chapter also gives instructions for caring for the poor. Whatever the reasons a person has come into need, the command is striking: we are not to harden our hearts or close our hands. Before diagnosing someone else's situation, perhaps the first question is directed toward us: What is happening in my own heart when I encounter need?

Checking My Attitude?

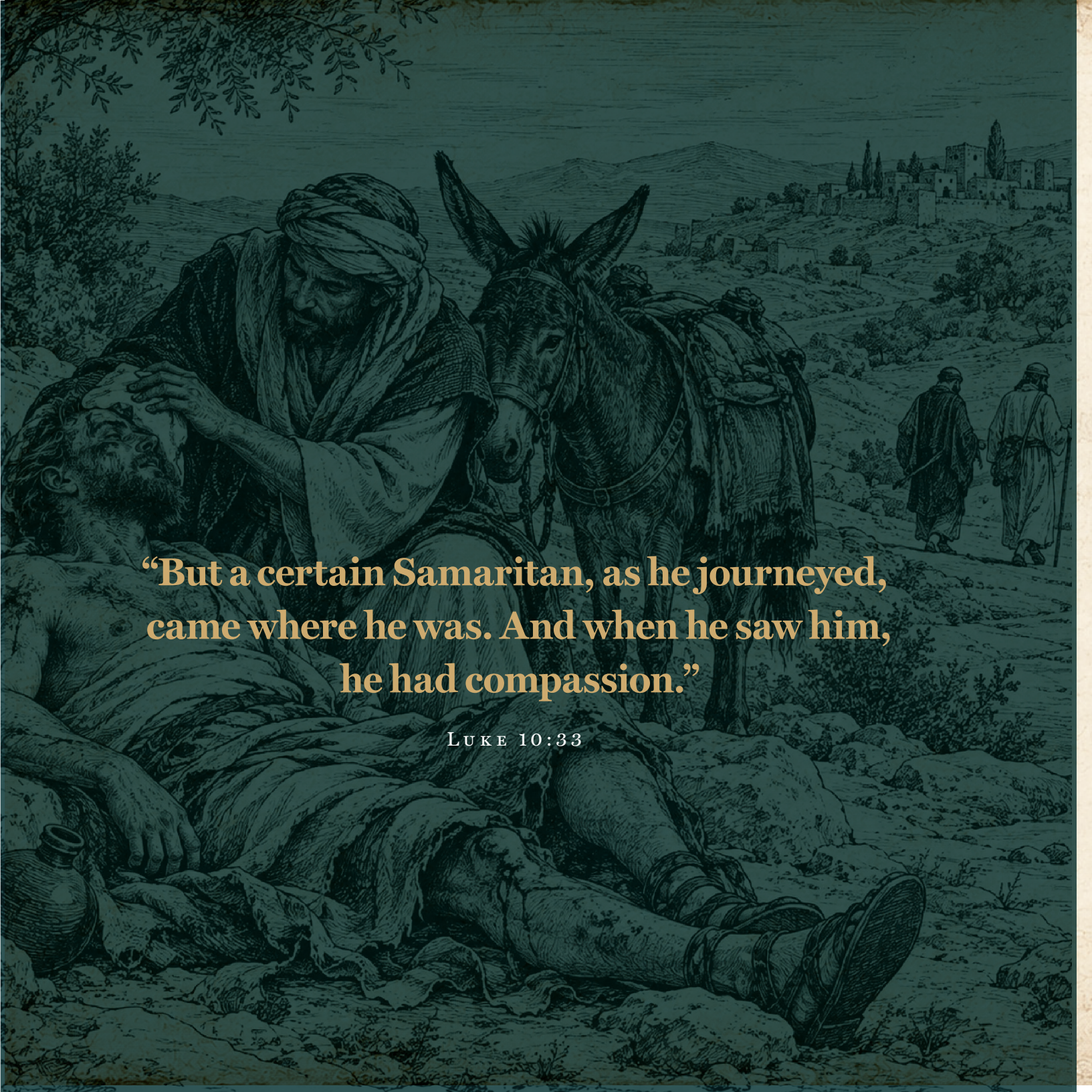
Deuteronomy 15:7,8 “If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend to him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.

Scripture also speaks plainly about work. Honest labor normally provides for our own needs and can create the capacity to share with others. That emphasis on responsibility belongs alongside the equally strong biblical command to generosity.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this. If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”

Ephesians 4: 28 “Let him who stole steal no longer but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”

Christ's compassion moves us toward people. Wisdom then asks what kind of help will actually serve them well. Sometimes the answer is immediate relief. Sometimes it is longer-term assistance. Sometimes genuine help may include encouragement toward responsibility and independence. How can we offer a hand up without allowing concern about dependency to harden us against a person's immediate need?



**“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed,
came where he was. And when he saw him,
he had compassion.”**

LUKE 10:33

That kind of discernment requires more than a quick judgment. We may need to listen, ask questions, understand limitations, and consider what kind of assistance is appropriate to the situation.

The Good Samaritan gives us an important starting point. The injured man's immediate need was not analyzed from a distance; it was met. Compassion acted first. From there, care continued in a practical and measured way.

Here we need to soberly consider this scriptural account: Luke 10:30-36 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

"Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came, and looked and passed by on the other side.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. "So, he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you. So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

LEVELS OF CARE

① PROPORTIONAL CARE

2 Corinthians 8:12 “For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but by equality, that now at this time our abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. As it is written, ‘He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.’”

② PERSONAL CARE

1 John 3:17 “For whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

(i) Seeing clearly leads to compassion. This compassion is God’s heart in the situation. Therefore, if God is compassionate for the situation, He will provide us with the discernment as to the proper help. We simply need to be willing. Our part may be to meet an immediate need, or to provide longer-term assistance. The latter situation will sometimes necessitate getting others involved, so as to share the load.

(ii) Guard against a hardened heart We need to avoid hardening our hearts, and consequently, miss His assignment; resulting in the loss of great personal blessing, not to mention the opportunity to assist a needy person, Zechariah 7: 1-14.

(iii) Give what you have 2 Corinthians 8:12; 1 Timothy 5:16; 1 Timothy 5:8; Acts 3:6 “Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

③ PERIODIC CARE

The church in Philippi sent gifts once and again to meet Paul's needs. These gifts were not perpetual, Philippians 4:16-19. Another scriptural example of periodic help includes: caring for the Hellenistic Jewish widows (Acts 6) and caring for the saints in Jerusalem through a collection sent from believers in Macedonia and Achaia (Romans 15).

④ PROVISIONAL CARE

There are also situations in which continuing a particular kind of assistance may not be the most helpful response. Scripture speaks directly to those who are able to work but refuse to do so. How can we take that instruction seriously while avoiding the assumption that everyone who is unemployed, dependent, or struggling is simply unwilling? Provisional care requires careful discernment, honest conversation, and attention to the individual situation. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 5:4-15;

⑤ PERPETUAL CARE

James's language about visiting widows and orphans points beyond a social visit toward meaningful care. James 1:27. First Timothy 5 also asks believers to think carefully about family responsibility and those who are genuinely without support. Some needs are not temporary; they require sustained, even lifelong, commitment.

A Hand Up Without Losing Compassion

Work can contribute to dignity, responsibility, and the ability to provide for daily needs. At the same time, people can arrive at need for many different reasons. How do we encourage responsibility without reducing every hardship to irresponsibility? And how do we provide immediate help without creating patterns that may ultimately hinder someone? These are not always easy questions. A wise response may require both compassion and discernment.

The guidelines in this booklet are intended to help us think through those questions while maintaining a healthy balance as givers. We do not have to possess great wealth. Even something as ordinary as an unused toaster in the basement can become a resource when it is sold, shared, or placed in the hands of someone who needs it.

Work, Responsibility, and Care

Scripture presents work as part of God's design for human life, both before and after the fall. Work is therefore more than a financial mechanism; it is connected to stewardship, provision, and responsibility.

Genesis 2:15 "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it."

Genesis 3: 17-19 "Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

At different times, however, any of us may find ourselves in need because of economic hardship, sickness, famine, war, death, or choices we have made. The causes are not always simple, and they are not always visible to an outsider. In those moments, God calls His people to combine truth with tangible care.

Obedience, Stewardship, and Generosity

Malachi 3:6-12 “For I am the LORD, I do not change, therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Yet from the days of your fathers, you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts. But you said, ‘In what way shall we return Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts. If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be enough room to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,’ says the LORD of hosts.” Obey the Voice of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 15:4 “Except when there may be no poor among you, for the LORD will greatly bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance—only if you carefully obey the voice of the LORD your God to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today.”

Potentials

Ephesians 2:10 describes good works that God has prepared for us. If we want to walk in those works wisely, we need both willing hearts and discernment.

People become impoverished for many reasons. If our goal is genuinely to help, we should resist assuming that every person or every situation is the same. What is the actual need? What circumstances contributed to it? What can this person do for himself or herself? What assistance would restore rather than diminish responsibility? And what might love require of us right now?

To help us think about those questions, I have organized care into five broad categories. They are not meant to reduce people to labels, but to give the giver a practical framework for considering what kind of help may be appropriate.

A quick response may sometimes be necessary, but at other times genuine care asks more of us. It may interrupt our plans and require attention, patience, prayer, or the involvement of others. Compassion is not always convenient.

The Map

2 Samuel 9:3 “Then the king (David) said, ‘Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God?’ And Ziba said to the king, ‘There is still a son, (Mephibosheth) of Jonathan who is lame in his feet.’”

2 Samuel 9:13 “So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king’s table. And he was lame in both his feet.”

Our capacity for compassion and love is connected to spiritual growth. Peter’s words below place brotherly kindness and love within a larger picture of Christian maturity, 2 Pt 1:1-8.

If we remain babes in Christ: 1 Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

If spiritual immaturity keeps our attention centered primarily on ourselves, growth in Christ should gradually enlarge our capacity to notice and care for others. Ephesians 4:15 calls us to speak the truth in love and to grow up into Christ.

Do I respond to people in need with inconvenience, suspicion, or fear – or with growing love and wisdom?

Who Needs Ongoing Care?

Some people are unable to care fully for themselves because of illness, disability, age, or other enduring limitations. These situations may require ongoing care rather than a temporary intervention. Scripture's concern for those who cannot simply work their way out of need should remain central to our thinking.

Matthew 11:5 “The blind see and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

Where possible, Scripture places meaningful responsibility on families to care for their own. At the same time, family situations can be complicated, and not everyone has a family able or willing to provide adequate care. Rather than using the biblical pattern as a reason to withdraw compassion, we can ask how families, churches, neighbors, and communities might share responsibility faithfully.

1 Timothy 5:4 “But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents, for this is good and acceptable before God.”

1 Timothy 5:8 “But if anyone does not provide for his own and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Recap

When we encounter a neighbor in need, we should seek to understand rather than assume. What is the actual need? What has contributed to it? What resources are already available? What kind of help would be proportionate, personal, periodic, provisional, or perpetual? The five categories are tools for discernment, not verdicts on a person's worth.

1. Proportional

3. Periodic

5. Perpetual

2. Personal

4. Provisional

Putting the Framework to Work

Considering poverty and personal need through this framework can help us respond more intentionally. Titus 3:14 urges God's people to learn to maintain good works in order to meet urgent needs. That requires more than good intentions; it requires personal investment.

John 11:4 "When Jesus heard that, He said 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'"

Discernment Without Presumption

Scripture sometimes connects suffering or discipline with spiritual realities, and it also contains examples in which suffering is explicitly not reduced to a simple judgment about the sufferer. That should make us careful. We may seek discernment without pretending that we always know why another person is suffering. "For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep." 1 Corinthians 11:30

If we want to render effective help, we should ask thoughtful questions about a person's circumstances while remaining humble about what we cannot know. Money alone will not solve every problem, but neither should spiritual

explanations become a reason to overlook material, educational, relational, or practical needs.

Deuteronomy presents obedience to God as central to Israel's flourishing. For readers who share that biblical conviction, the challenge is not merely to identify what is wrong with society, but to ask what obedience requires of us personally and corporately.

That begins with our own response: turning toward the Lord, allowing our thinking to be corrected, and asking how His ways should shape our treatment of our neighbors.

We should encourage responsibility, work, provision for one's household, and readiness to meet legitimate needs. But the credibility of that message depends in part on whether people can also see generosity, patience, and sacrificial love among us. If the church is to demonstrate God's kingdom life to the world, both truth and tangible care must be visible.

Galatians 6:7 says, "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." So, let us sow to the Spirit good works. In this way we will bring Him glory and honor. Then we will hear from the Lord, "Well done."

A Deeper Poverty

When we consider the level of poverty in the world, it is natural to long for a true and lasting solution.

Deuteronomy connects the flourishing of God's people with obedience to His commands. That raises a challenging question for us: What might our communities look like if generosity, responsibility, justice, work, and care for the vulnerable were taken with equal seriousness?

For more than sixty years I have also observed another kind of poverty that weighs heavily on my heart: poverty of spirit and soul, which can affect the body and our relationships as well. Scripture pushes us to look beneath circumstances and consider the condition of the human heart. Yet that examination should begin with ourselves as readily as with others.

Consider the following from Scripture: Isaiah 53:6 “All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

It is easy to recognize entitlement or avoidance of responsibility in other people. It is harder – and perhaps more fruitful – to ask where those tendencies lie within us. Where do I expect others to carry what belongs to me? Where do I resist accountability or correction? And where might I be tempted to explain another person’s struggle before I have listened to his or her story?

There are certainly situations in which able-bodied people become dependent on others when greater responsibility is possible. But dependency can also grow from disability, trauma, economic disruption, family breakdown, lack of opportunity, or patterns that have developed over many years. If we want to offer a genuine hand up, we need enough humility to distinguish among those realities rather than assuming one explanation fits everyone.

Isaiah’s language brings the question back to all of us: we are all like sheep who have turned to our own ways. The deepest problem, then, is not simply “those people” or “our culture.” The need for restoration reaches every human heart.

In John 10: 9,10 Jesus says: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

Jesus describes a thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy, in contrast to the abundant life He gives. The Christian story understands human suffering within a spiritual conflict as well as within the ordinary realities of life. That conviction should deepen compassion rather than make us quick to assign blame.

The booklet ultimately returns to the hope at the center of the Christian faith: Jesus Christ and what He accomplished through His death and resurrection. The practical call to care for our neighbor is not separate from that hope; it is one way the life of His kingdom becomes visible among us.

Scripture points toward the return of Christ and the final defeat of evil, rebellion, suffering, sorrow, and death, Revelation 11:15. Christian hope looks toward that restoration while also calling us to embody Christ's love now. We begin by receiving the life He offers and then allowing that life to reshape how we see God, ourselves, and the people around us.

OVER MY LIFETIME I have witnessed Jesus dramatically change the lives of people who yielded themselves to Him. My hope is that this booklet does more than offer a framework for helping others. I hope it also invites each of us to receive His life more deeply and to become people whose compassion takes visible, practical form.



Visit me on  YouTube 

The Gardener's Field Farms
@davelouden-v2v

davelouden.com