

Sharing with the Vulnerable
Sunday School Lesson
James 2:14-17; Exodus 22:21-27
October 2, 2022

Let us sing our call to study the Scripture. Let's sing *The Lily of the Valley*:

*I've found a friend in Jesus, He's everything to me,
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul;
The Lily of the Valley, in Him alone I see
All I need to cleanse and make me fully whole.*

*In sorrow He's my comfort, in trouble He's my stay,
He tells me every care on Him to roll.
He's the Lily of the Valley, the Bright and Morning Star,
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.*

*He all my grief has taken, and all my sorrows borne;
In temptation, He's my strong and mighty tow'r;
I have all for Him forsaken and all my idols torn
From my heart and now He keeps me by His pow'r.*

*Though all the world forsake me and Satan tempt me sore,
Through Jesus, I shall safely reach the goal;
He's the Lily of the Valley, the Bright and Morning Star,
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.*

**Let us pray
O Holy God,**

We thank you for your Spirit that lives with us each day. Give us wisdom to make the choices that lead to a life of joy and generosity. Help us listen to your Spirit so we may discern your ways. Amen.

Our Purpose Statement:

To ponder ways to share with the marginalized and vulnerable members of society.

Understanding Poverty

For a minute, let us put aside our political party affiliation and learn about poverty, then discuss the two Scriptures.

Bill Ehlig and Ruby K Payne wrote a book entitled ***What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty***. A copy of the book will be placed in each of your Sunday School classrooms in case someone is curious enough to read it. In the Introduction, they laid out some basic understandings about poverty that many of us have never had to encounter. Some key points about poverty need to be made.

- 1 Poverty and wealth are relative. We basically know our own poverty or wealth only in relationship to others.

- 2 Poverty occurs in all races and countries. The notion of middle class as a large segment of society is a phenomenon of the past 100 years. In the US the largest group of individuals in poverty is children under the age of 18. If one counts the number of children in poverty or very close to it, the number is close to 50%. One of the biggest misconceptions is the difference between percentages and numbers. The greatest number of children in poverty are white, but the greatest percentage of children in poverty is by minority group.
- 3 Generational and situational poverty are different. It generally takes two generations to make the transition from middle class into poverty. When an individual has been in poverty two generations or more, then the patterns and habits are different. Situational poverty is when there is a death, divorce, or illness, and the resources are temporarily reduced, but the mindset remain largely with the middle class.
- 4 This work is based on patterns of the group, and all patterns have exceptions.
- 5 Every individual brings with him or her the hidden rules of the economic group in which he or she was raised. Hidden rules are those unspoken cueing mechanisms we use to let people know they do or do not belong.
- 6 Schools and businesses use the hidden rules of middle class. So do many churches. Because America now tends to be economically segregated, most individuals do not know the rules of the other economic class.
- 7 For churches to be successful with the poor, members must understand the hidden rules of generational poverty, as well as middle class, so that the transition can be more readily accepted. For the transition to occur, both sets of rules must be openly acknowledged.
- 8 To move from poverty to middle-class norms and values, a period of time exists where some relationships are broken. These relationships may be resumed at another time, but there is a period of time in which the old relationships are very tentative and, sometimes, broken.
- 9 The fundamental reasons for poverty are lack of educational attainment and the disconnection of family and/or community.
- 10 Four reasons one leaves poverty: It's too painful to stay, a vision or goal, a key relationship, or a special talent or skill.

Read James 2:14-17

The book of James is wisdom literature in the New Testament. James hits hard and never lets up. He believes that the gospel should actually change the hearts of people. He believes that changed hearts lead to the service of neighbor. Where does he get such a notion? Follow Jesus throughout the gospel then look at the life of the early church as outlined in the Book of Acts. Jesus did not just tell people what to do; he fed the hungry, gave sight to the blind, helped the lame walk again, healed the dying, restored hearing, and gave voice to the silent. The early church made sure to care for the widows and the orphans. They fed the hungry and cared for the sick just as Jesus taught them to do. Yes, they worshiped together but they worked together to alleviate suffering.

Read Exodus 22:21-27

The law of Moses is very clear. God loves immigrants. Us? Well, not so much if you believe the political rhetoric. This isn't anything new in our country. If you read American history you can see that while immigration has made our country what it is, we have persecuted immigrants all throughout our history. We seemed glad to import Africans for slavery but once they were freed, people sought ways to get rid of them. US history specifies four distinct waves of immigration.

1. 1840s and 1850s - 4 million immigrants from Ireland, north and western Europe and Germany
2. 1880s – 5 million from north and west Europe and Germany
3. Late 1890s to early 1900s – 20 million Europe, mostly from southern and eastern
4. 1960s to present – 20 million Europe, Latin America and Asia

The law of Moses also had strict laws caring for orphans and widows since women were not allowed to hold property. Its credit restrictions were also tight. If you loaned money to someone poor and took their coat as collateral, you had to return the coat whether or not you were repaid. I'm not sure God would approve of the predatory credit practices of today.

So What Do We Do?

In the book, *What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty*, Ehlig and Payne make the point in the last chapter that most churches find their greatest success in working with children and mothers. Maybe Moses knew something that we did not know. The book says the mother is the determining factor in the level a child achieves in school. Friends, this is something we should explore. If you are looking for a way to volunteer at present, The Camden Fairview School District has a reading program that uses volunteers. I plan to go to the second grade classrooms to volunteer every Wednesday morning for an hour. They have a training video. Interested? Call the school district office at (870)836-4193.

How do we reconcile the Bible's teaching with our political views?

As far as I am concerned, neither political party has taken a serious movement towards a comprehensive immigration policy. Some people cheered two weeks ago when a government official chartered a private plane to take fifty immigrants from San Antonio, Texas to Martha's Venue while another plane took immigrants by bus to the Vice-President's residence. These were not illegal immigrants. They had entered the country legally, seeking asylum from Venezuela. They were deceived into believing jobs, healthcare, housing, and services would be available to them at the end of their journey. How do you think God or even Moses would have perceived that situation? Honestly, I would not wish to be nearby to hear what God had to say.

Former President George W. Bush was the last president to propose legislation to fix our broken system. Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007 was portrayed as a compromise between providing a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and increased border enforcement: it included funding for 300 miles (480 km) of vehicle

barriers, 105 camera and radar towers, and 20,000 more Border Patrol agents, while simultaneously restructuring visa criteria around high-skilled workers. Though it was brought back and amended several times, it never passed.

Both poverty and immigration are difficult issues for Christians to tackle, especially in the current political environment and yet, our understanding of God and justice calls for us to do what we can. Immigration becomes less of a problem when other nations are not overrun with poverty and violence. I remember my college history teacher always saying that revolutions always follow hunger. The United Methodist Church serves impoverished countries through UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) and our Global Ministries. We have agricultural ministries that assist farmers in developing countries, we have health care facilities in poorer countries, and we have educational resources. In natural disasters, UMCOR is usually one of the first agencies to arrive and the last agency to leave. Our apportionment dollars and our special offerings help with these efforts.

**Prayer: Almighty God, what would you have us do in the year 2022 and beyond that might impact the community so that all would know you are God and come to know Jesus as Lord?
Amen.**