

# Refreshed Are Those Who Refresh

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



*"Still Life with Hyacinths and Carpet"* by August Macke

## Prayer of Illumination

Gracious God, we do not live by bread alone. Let the heavenly food of the scripture we are about to hear nourish us today in the ways of eternal life, through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.

## Introduction

I love the book of Proverbs—it's so practical and deals with living in the real world. There are conveniently 31 chapters—you could read a chapter a day each month—reading Proverbs 12 times a year. Proverbs offers us wisdom for living: on trusting God, leading governments, making decisions, handling finances, marriage and family, cultivating friendships, and conducting business affairs.

Proverbs tells us the wise live their lives by acting virtuously toward others and reverently towards God. Money is helpful in life, according to Proverbs, but how we get it and how we use it are of the utmost importance. In fact, Proverbs talks a lot, not just about our relationship with money, but about our relationship with the less fortunate. The two are inter-connected.

Proverbs tells us that godly wisdom involves being generous, just, and compassionate to the least of these. The poor and the hungry are to receive our special attention and care. Hunger matters to God and it therefore matters to us.

So on this Hunger Awareness Sunday we'll be looking at a few, not all, of the passages in Proverbs that speak to our relationship with the Hungry. But before we do this, I'd like you to hear about a real story of hunger in life of Deron, Miley, and Aunt Jessie from Phoenix, AZ.

Play: <https://youtu.be/nqYFEhCfiE4>

In the last twenty years great inroads have been made on extreme poverty around the world. It has almost been halved in two decades. However, trends have started shifting in the last several years. Plus, COVID this year has been a gamechanger. There's been an amazing response of 17 trillion in aid around the world—that has made a difference. But things are still fragile. More is needed.

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, there's a shadow pandemic going on now too—the pandemic of hunger. The poor have less cushioning to soften the blow during pandemics, natural disasters, and economic crises. This week the World Bank estimates that 88 to 115 million more people will be pushed into extreme poverty in 2020 as a result of the pandemic and the economic fall-out. Extreme poverty is defined as living on less than \$2.00 a day.

Similarly, World Vision says that the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to double the number of people facing food crises. This means between 6,000 and 12,000 people per day could die from hunger directly linked to the social and economic impacts of the pandemic before the end of this year. More might die from hunger than from the coronavirus itself.

Yes, 2020 has been a tough year. This is a church issue and a state issue.

- 10% of food relief comes from churches and non-profits.
- 90% comes from governments.

There are times for church and state to be separated, and other situations to work hand in hand—along with all the religions of the world. Hunger is one of them.

Here are the latest statistics of how the pandemic has impacted the USA:

- 1/3 of those relying on food banks now in the US DIDN'T before COVID.
- In the U.S., 6 million Americans became eligible for food stamps since the early months of the pandemic.
- Those most impacted are women, children, and minority communities.
- This year, 10% of adults in the US sometimes haven't had enough food to eat in the last week.
- 1 in 6 renters are behind in payments—having to choose to either pay rent or eat. \*25% of adults with children are behind on rent.

Jesus was all about feeding the multitudes—so it's important to us. Hunger is a human need that knows no boundaries. It's something that all of us can rally around to help.

***So let's hear from selected verses from Proverbs.***

## SERMON – Refreshed Are Those Who Refresh

### Scripture Readings

#### *Proverbs 11:25 (NLT)*

“The generous will prosper;  
those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.”

Another way this verse could be translated is:

“‘The soul who blesses’ or ‘one who brings blessings to others’ will prosper.”

This verse can be understood this way: The deed impacts the doer. We have choices to make in our lives—and one of them is between either kindness or cruelty, or empathy or callousness. Our actions towards others, whether good or bad, have unintended consequences upon ourselves. Or another way the Bible puts it: you reap what you sow.

Proverbs gives us some good guidance:

Being kind is a reward to yourself.  
Being cruel does harm to yourself.  
It’s in your best self-interest to be generous.

One scholar put it this way—our Judeo-Christian faith sees our economy not merely as a cash economy (make as much as possible), but as a gift economy (in working and giving we are enriched). The generous, not the greedy, will be enriched.

Giving inspires giving. Others want to bless too. It’s counterintuitive: One who gives water will drink to the full. If you care about yourself, you’ll care for others. Sometimes we have the means to help, other times we are dependent upon the help of others.

It’s all connected.

#### *Proverbs 14:21 (NLT)*

“It is a sin to belittle one’s neighbor;  
blessed are those who help the poor.”

Literally in Hebrew, those that spurn the hungry are called “sinners.” In another passage in Proverbs the warning is stronger,

“cursed are those who close their eyes to the poor.”

But blessed or happy are those who have compassion on the poor. This speaks to not only our inner disposition towards the poor, but our outer expression of kindness through help. There’s a joy in doing what God enjoys and cares about. Blessed are those who are good to the poor.

Contempt and callousness towards the vulnerable is not only a rejection of God's will, but also a rejection of God's blessing.

***Proverbs 14:31 (NLT)***

"Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,  
but helping the poor honors him."

Proverbs makes it clear: mockery of the poor is blasphemy.

To oppress the poor is to insult the Creator—who made both the oppressor and the oppressed.

But kindness to the needy honors both the Creator and the creature. As Christians we've been called by God to be in a certain kind of relationship with the poor—that of mutual respect. And so our relationship with the destitute is both ethical and spiritual.

***Proverbs 22:9 (NLT)***

"Blessed are those who are generous,  
because they feed the poor."

In Hebrew "the generous" is literally translated "the good of eye."

The stingy are translated "the evil of eye."

To be generous is to have a kindly eye towards the poor.

To be stingy is to have "the evil eye" towards the poor.

This blessing is not only from God, but from the poor. When rich and poor are in relationship with one another, there's a mutuality going on of learning and growing together. Rich and poor all become more human and humane when we care for each other.

Deuteronomy guides us:

"Give liberally and ungrudgingly,  
and the Lord will bless you in all that you undertake."

The kindly share their food with the poor—we don't hoard it for ourselves. Sharing brings joy. Another's happiness becomes your happiness.

Another passage says,

"those who lend to the poor lend to the Lord and will be repaid in full."

And of course as Jesus says:

If you've "done it unto the least of these, you've done it unto me."

**Proverbs 22:22-23 (NLT)**

“Don’t rob the poor just because you can, or exploit the needy in court. For the LORD is their defender. He will ruin anyone who ruins them.”

God is the Defender of the poor. The literal Hebrew word is “champion.” God is the champion of the poor. He fights for them. I don’t know about you, but in the boxing ring of life, I don’t want to be in the opposite corner of God Almighty and the poor.

“Don’t reject the poor for their poverty nor despise them at the gate, for the Lord takes up their cause—he is their protector.”

How we treat the poor is exactly how we will be treated by God.

Proverbs 21:13 gives even stronger words: God will rob the life of those who rob the helpless.

“If you close your ear to the cry of the poor, you will cry out and not be heard.”

And finally:

**Proverbs 31:8-9 (NLT)**

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves;  
ensure justice for those being crushed.  
Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless,  
and see that they get justice.”

Protect the powerless. The insecure. Speak up for those who are socially mute:

For those who don’t have an advocate or strong voice in the system of justice. Be their voice, Proverbs says.

As scholar Roland Murphy put it, this is what is commanded,

“not building up the treasury, not creating monuments, nor establishing a large military.”

Instead, this: speak up for those who cannot speak up. This is our spiritual, social, and scriptural responsibility.

Amen.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.***

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