

Hook, Line, and Sinker

Help, LORD. . . Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips but harbor deception in their hearts.

(Psalm 12:1–2)

Scripture: Psalm 12

Song: “Rescue”

On a recent podcast, I learned about “catfishing,” a scam targeting vulnerable people through social media platforms and dating apps. A perpetrator cunningly builds trust, then once a victim is emotionally hooked, asks for money and personal information to access the victim’s bank accounts and acquire property.

King David heard about such people, those who, as Paul also wrote, “by smooth talk and flattery, . . . deceive the minds of naïve people” (Romans 16:18). David was outraged and cried out to God for help, and God responded by promising to rescue those who were innocent victims.

Just as in biblical times, we must be aware that scammers will try to lure susceptible people like the lonely and elderly. People lie boldly to further their own cause or to avoid potential consequences. It’s an uphill battle; but may our example of honesty point others to the One whose love reaches to the heavens and whose faithfulness reaches to the skies (Psalm 57:10).

Father, help me protect others against those who would intentionally hurt them and to live a life of love and truth. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

March 9–15. **Rebecca Stuhlmiller** helps people take practical steps to grow deeper in their love relationship with Jesus and wider in loving service to their neighbor. She and her husband, Jeff, live in Federal Way, Washington.

A Worthwhile Investment

[Jesus said,] “Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail.”

(Luke 12:33)

Scripture: Luke 12:13–21, 33–34

Song: “I’d Rather Have Jesus”

One morning, an appeal popped up in my inbox. A missionary to Ukraine needed \$10,000 to purchase a reliable, fuel-efficient vehicle to transport children to medical appointments in nearby cities. “Would you consider making a gift today?” I looked at our budget and was thrilled to see a positive balance in our “discretionary giving” column.

Though we give a percentage of our income to the church on a regular basis, sometimes there’s nothing left for spontaneous giving. In this passage, Jesus teaches about priorities by telling a man that every dollar he spent on material possessions or hoarded for himself would be wasted, but investing in the lives of people would be eternal.

A few weeks after my contribution, the response from the missionary inspired me. “Because of your generosity, we not only bought the car but extra food and winter clothing. One 11-year-old girl whose father was killed in the war and whose mother succumbed to alcoholism was fed, bathed, clothed, and treated for fleas and worms. The transformation restored light and hope to her young life.” Giving not only made a difference in her life but contributed to my spiritual growth. Learning to spend less in order to give more is a continuing and intentional process.

Father, help me be content to spend less on myself so I can invest more in Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Abide by the Rules

“Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.”
(Leviticus 19:11)

Scripture: Leviticus 19:11–18

Song: “This Is My Commandment”

As a child, I enjoyed swimming on hot summer days. My sister and I pedaled our bikes to the park, locked them up, and then dashed inside the locker room to change and shower. Before we plunged into the water, a staff member asked us to read the pool rules posted on the wall: *No diving! No running! No food!* These regulations were directives issued for our protection to ensure our safety and well-being.

Staff members didn't need to tell swimmers, “Have fun!” or “Cool off!” Those were the natural benefits of the swimming experience. In the same way, when the Israelites entered the promised land, Moses didn't need to remind them to “Enjoy your abundance!” or “Relish your freedom!” But God knew His people were prone to self-centered living and would need safeguards to guide them toward right living and ensure that they would live without harm and in honor of God.

Some people view Christianity as a collection of rules and think God is a killjoy, but the rules He gives us aren't meant to squelch our fun. Far from being restrictive, they guide us toward a life of love and respect for Him and our fellow human beings.

Father, help me live in obedience to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Do Unto Others

If you really keep the royal law, . . . “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.
(James 2:8–9)

Scripture: James 2:8–13

Song: “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands”

Once when I was shopping at Walmart, a woman tugged at my elbow. Cradling a jar of mayonnaise between her arm and her body and juggling her phone, she typed “milk” into a translation app and pointed to the jar. I shook my head. The woman was Chinese, and the labels and packaging on the food were a mystery to her. After guiding her to the dairy section, I picked up a carton of milk and pointed to her phone. Then she typed “yogurt,” and we spent the next few minutes searching for what she was looking for. Our interaction deeply blessed my heart, as well as hers.

Having lived overseas, I understand her struggle. Although most people were helpful and friendly, I occasionally received words of reprimand from natives who were not pleased that I wasn’t fluent in their language even though I was learning. Not everyone welcomes a stranger. However, in this passage, James reminds us that the way of Jesus has no room for discrimination.

When we read the Bible, we are reminded of God’s perspective of all people in the world and how they should be treated. There is no hierarchy, and when we consider ourselves superior to any, it breaks God’s ultimate command to love others.

Father, help me remember that every person is precious in Your sight. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

But for the Grace of God

“When he saw him, he took pity on him. . . . ‘Go and do likewise.’” (Luke 10:33, 37)

Scripture: Luke 10:25–37

Song: “Give Me Your Eyes”

Orphaned at 14, my Grandpa Henry worked in the sugar beet fields in Eastern Montana. After settling on a farm, he met and married my grandma and raised a family. Sometimes men from a homeless encampment near the railroad track wandered across the field and into their yard. Instead of chasing them away, Grandpa asked Grandma to make sandwiches and brew coffee. Then he gave the men tasks that were equal to their physical abilities. If a bunkhouse was vacant, Grandpa let the men stay and work for as long as they wanted.

When Grandpa met one of these men, he didn’t see skin color, addiction, or class—only a person in need. Having been on the road as a teen, Grandpa thought, “There, but for the grace of God, go I,” and he answered God’s command to extend selfless, sacrificial love in response to the kindness and mercy Jesus has shown him.

When we encounter struggling people, we should remember that every person we meet has been made “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). Behind every face, there’s a story and a need for empathy. Our willingness to stop what we’re doing and offer practical sympathy, as my grandpa did, is a testament to our dedication to Jesus and His heart of compassion.

Father, help me stop and help those in my path who need a touch from You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Open Handed

If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites. . . . be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.
(Deuteronomy 15:7–8)

Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:4–11

Song: “Make Me a Blessing”

A friend told me about the benevolence ministry at her church, which benefits members in need. It reminded me of the financial support I received from a church 40 years ago. Despite the seemingly stable situation of my first husband being enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, which provided free housing and medical care, our young family struggled to make ends meet. Ashamed but desperate, I met with the base chaplain, and his one-time gift of \$100 lifted a burden from my shoulders.

As Moses shared God’s word with the Israelites, he reminded them that although they were entering a land of abundant blessing, they would encounter fellow Israelites in need. The people were to remember the blessings of God and how they too had once been in need. They were to extend kindness and goodwill to anyone who asked for it. There was no room for judgment or stipulations, only a command to practice generosity in the same way God had been generous to them.

In the New Testament, Jesus reminds His disciples that there are poor among them (John 12:8), and the same is true today. There are under-resourced people in our community of believers, and our collective efforts can make a significant difference. There’s no reason for us to be stingy.

Father, help me be intentional in using my resources and bringing hope to those in need. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Lending a Helping Hand

“Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?” (Matthew 25:44)

Scripture: Matthew 25:41–45

Song: “Do Something”

For years, I taught home management skills to young moms because I’d once been overwhelmed with this role. Lately, my attention has turned to seniors who face the daunting task of moving from their family homes to assisted living. As we struggle together to decide what possessions they should keep and what to let go of, compassion wells up in my heart when tears well up in their eyes. How will they manage alone?

According to Jesus, they shouldn’t have to. In the future judgment of the nations, Jesus will divide people into two groups. The “sheep” will inherit eternal life because they cared for hurting people, but “goats” are doomed for separation because they ignored people in need, and thus ignored Jesus Himself.

Older people need us to come alongside them during times of transition. Hungry people need us to help provide their basic physical needs. Lonely, outcast people need us to show them grace and hope. It’s up to us to respond to “the least of these” with emotional and practical support—not as a means to our salvation, but as evidence of our loving relationship with God.

Father, give me a heart like Yours to come alongside those in need. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.