

God Calls for Restitution

“Whoever steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.” (Exodus 22:1)

Scripture: Exodus 22:1–6

Song: “God of Justice, Love and Mercy”

As kids, whether my brother Scott and I were wrecking each other’s things or taking one other’s stuff, our cry was the same: “Mom!” The one who was wronged ran to her, confident she’d make things right, while the other sprinted in the opposite direction.

Restitution is God’s character and His heart. He cares for the oppressed; nothing is equal in His restitution plan. It is not an ox for an ox and a sheep for a sheep. Instead, it’s five head of cattle for one stolen ox and four sheep for one stolen lamb. God’s call to restitution goes beyond what’s expected to set things right.

Our cry for justice has a name: God! And His restitution call is for all. If you’re the offender sprinting in the opposite direction, hear God’s call. Ask for forgiveness and act beyond the expected to set things right. If you’re the one who has been wronged, hear God’s call. Trust His heart and ask for His help. He sees you, is for you, and is the one who promises to make all wrongs right.

Father, You are the champion of the oppressed. I turn to You and ask You to make all that is wrong right again. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

July 13–19. **Lenae Bulthuis** lives with her husband, Mike, on a Minnesota grain and livestock farm. She enjoys spending time with her family, playing pickleball, and engaging in long conversations about Jesus and His grace.

Let the Oppressed Go Free

“Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6)

Scripture: Isaiah 58:3–7

Song: “No Longer Slaves”

The poster attached to the back of the airport bathroom door read: “Help is here.” Below the bold heading was an image of a global hand signal. Those in danger can alert airport personnel of their plight by extending their palm outward, tucking in their thumb, and covering it with their remaining fingers. The poster doubled as a wake-up call to be attentive to anyone asking for help.

Isaiah 58 is God’s wake-up call to true worship. Genuine worshipers put their faith into action by seeking justice for the oppressed. God, who exercises kindness and justice, instructs us to help others by loosing the chains of injustice, setting the oppressed free, sharing our food with the hungry, providing shelter to the poor wanderer, clothing the naked, and being available to anyone who needs help.

The universal hand signal for help is a victim’s raised, closed fist. The God of the universe’s justice plan for all is through His children extending a willing, generous, open hand to help. When we reflect His heart, “Help is here” is no longer three words on an airport bathroom door. It becomes a reality as God uses us to set captives free.

Father, You desire justice for the oppressed. Teach me to live wide awake to people’s needs and to be open-handed to help. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Blessings and Woes

“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” (Luke 6:21)

Scripture: Luke 6:20–26

Song: “In Christ Alone”

While the three-year-old boy made sandcastles, his parents engaged him in a game of opposites. The first words they tossed the boy’s way were easy: *up/down, hot/cold, big/small*. Then the boy took the lead and said, “free.” The adults were unsure how best to express the opposite of *free* to a preschooler. Weary of waiting, the boy said, “Not free,” and it was game over.

In Luke 6, Jesus clarifies a new way of being blessed that looks radically different from the old world order. For Jesus’ followers, the poor and hungry are blessed, not the rich and well-fed. The grieved and rejected are blessed, not those who laugh and are well-liked.

The four blessings and four woes in this Scripture passage are not child’s play, and Jesus doesn’t play games. He wants His followers to fully understand that it’s not our outward circumstances—possessions, position, pleasures, or popularity—that equate happiness. Just the opposite! It’s our inner attitude and condition of the heart. Only a relationship with Jesus can bring true blessings. The truly blessed are the ones whose first love is Jesus and whose greatest joy and satisfaction is living in relationship with Christ alone. Anything less is a woeful game over.

Father, whatever my outer circumstances, may my heart be all Yours. Be my first love. May my greatest joy be in You alone. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Love, Hospitality, and Contentment

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.
(Hebrews 13:1)

Scripture: Hebrews 13:1–6

Song: “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us”

As a child, Sunday night was guest night. It was the one night of the week when my parents regularly invited another family or two for coffee, dessert, and ham sandwiches. While my parents opened our home to all, my siblings and I voiced a limited criteria. We only wanted families who had kids our age whom we enjoyed!

In today’s reading, we learn that God’s motive for hospitality isn’t our happiness but demonstrating His love. God’s love has no limits. He loves all people all the time. He urges us to do the same with these two short words: *Keep on*. Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Keep on showing hospitality to strangers. Keep on remembering those in prison. And if you’re married, keep on loving your spouse.

“Keep on” sounds antiquated in today’s cancel culture. If something better comes along, we cancel plans. If someone irritates or offends us, we cancel them. This is not God’s heart. God never cancels us. Whether you’re the one who cancels or someone has canceled you, God’s deep love for us will always keep on. May our love for others, whether we enjoy them or not, do the same.

Father, thank You for Your love without limits. Help me use my words, actions, and invitations to love all people all the time as You love me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Put Love into Action

We know we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. (1 John 3:14)

Scripture: 1 John 3:14–18

Song: “By Our Love”

When our teenage daughters were out with friends past our bedtime, not theirs, we established a clear family signal. When they returned, they were to turn off the porch lights. Lights on, they were still gone. Lights off, they were safely home. With one look at the front porch, we could know.

John gave his readers a clear way to know whether they had eternal life. In a word, it's love. John wrote, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other.” Then he defined this love by writing, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16).

Loving others doesn't save us; only Jesus can do that! When He does, we can know we have passed from death to a life that is truly life, and others will experience a love that is truly love. When we put Christ's love into action, lives are laid down, needs are met, and love goes beyond words and acts. With one look at God's children, the world will see His love until we are all safe in our eternal home.

Father, thank You for salvation in Jesus Christ. May I know Your love and make it known through my words and my actions. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Commit Your Way to God

The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously. (Psalm 37:21)

Scripture: Psalm 37:1–5, 18–22

Song: “Goodness of God”

“You can tell who the Christians are,” my 7-year-old daughter Melanie said as we returned our grocery cart to the store’s corral. “They always put their carts away.” Melanie’s childlike conclusion wasn’t about the cart but the heart.

The heart of God’s people is generosity. They are generous because their trust and confidence are in who they are, what they have, and who gave it to them. They are God’s children, who “spend their days under the LORD’s care,” and what they have is an eternal inheritance from God that will never end (v. 18). Even in times of disaster and “days of famine they will enjoy plenty” (v. 19). It can sound more like wishful thinking than truth-filled reality if you’re short on cash, stressed about finances, or have no groceries in your cupboard or cart.

But where we place our trust changes everything. We’ll live from lack if our trust is in our circumstances, self, or savings account. We’ll feel like we aren’t enough, don’t have enough, and have nothing to give. But those who trust in the Lord live generously because they trust God and have committed their lives to Him. From God’s generous goodness, the righteous generously live.

Father, thank You for Your goodness. May I be generous with all You have generously given me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Salvation for Zacchaeus

[Jesus] looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”
(Luke 19:5)

Scripture: Luke 19:1–10

Song: “Change My Heart, O God”

I asked the room of elementary school children, “When someone is mean to you, would you rather be kind or mean back?” Their hands shot up—be kind. I reiterated that I wasn’t looking for the “right” answer; I wanted an honest one. Then their hands dropped because being kind to mean people wasn’t what they wanted to do.

In Luke 19, we meet a short, cheating tax collector named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus loved money more than people, and the people responded by hating him back. When Jesus came to town, no one moved so Zacchaeus could see Jesus. It’s why Zacchaeus had to climb a tree. But Jesus’ heart is always love. Love is why Jesus told Zacchaeus to come down immediately so they could go to his house together.

We don’t know what Zacchaeus served for dinner, but Jesus’ love changed and saved him. Zacchaeus generously made restitution—not because he had to, but because he wanted to. When we understand the depth of Jesus’ love for us, He changes the desires of our hearts. He moves us beyond knowing what is right to doing what’s right because we want to. Jesus transforms and loves us into people who want to love.

Father, thank You for Your love. Change my heart with Your love so that I love as You do. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.