

JUSTICE AND THE MARGINALIZED

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Deuteronomy 24:10-21](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Deuteronomy 24:10-21](#)

DEUTERONOMY 24:10-21

¹⁰ When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered to you as a pledge. ¹¹ Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. ¹² If the neighbor is poor, do not go to sleep with their pledge in your possession. ¹³ Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God.

¹⁴ Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. ¹⁵ Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

¹⁶ Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

¹⁷ Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. ¹⁸ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

¹⁹ When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰ When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. ²¹ When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.



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KEY TEXT

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.—Deuteronomy 24:18

JUSTICE, LAW, HISTORY

Unit 2: God: The Source of Justice

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe ways Israel showed justice toward the marginalized.
2. Explain the importance of Israel's remembrance of God's redemption.
3. Suggest one practical way he or she can help a marginalized individual or family.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. Ignorance and Want

B. Lesson Context

I. Just Lending (Deuteronomy 24:10–13)

A. Respecting the Person (vv. 10–11)

B. Respecting the Pledge (vv. 12–13)

II. Just Labor (Deuteronomy 24:14–15)

A. Oppression Forbidden (v. 14)

B. Opportune Wages (v. 15)

Beware of Opportunism!

III. Just Community (Deuteronomy 24:16–18)

A. Commanding Punishment (v. 16)

B. Caring for the Needy (v. 17)

C. Corporate Memory (v. 18)

The Power of Memory

IV. Just Harvest (Deuteronomy 24:19–21)

A. Regarding Grain (v. 19)

B. Regarding Produce (vv. 20–21)

Conclusion

A. Ignorance and Want, Today

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Babylonian Bab-ih-low-nee-un.

Boaz Bo-az.

Hammurabi Ham-muh-rah-bee.

Malachi Mal-uh-kye.

Mediterranean	<i>Med-uh-tuh-ray-nee-un.</i>
Torah (<i>Hebrew</i>)	<i>Tor-uh.</i>
Zechariah	<i>Zek-uh-rye-uh.</i>

Introduction

A. Ignorance and Want

In Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, the Ghost of Christmas Present guides Ebenezer Scrooge on a tour of various scenes around London. Some scenes highlight holiday celebrations, while others show poverty-stricken individuals, including Scrooge’s own employee, Bob Cratchit.

Toward the end of the tour, the ghost reveals two destitute children beneath the folds of his robe, a boy named Ignorance and a girl named Want. The ghost warns Scrooge, “Beware them both ... but most of all beware this boy.”

Through these characters, Dickens drew his readers’ attention to issues of ignorance and want regarding the economic challenges of his day, which was mid-nineteenth-century England. Many people of that time and place experienced want and neglect and were otherwise marginalized. Those who were better off often adopted a stance of willful ignorance toward the situation. Scrooge’s next words aptly describe that attitude: “Cover [the children Ignorance and Want]; I do not wish to see them.” Unfortunately, many still react this way, avoiding issues of economic justice by looking the other way. [Deuteronomy 24:10–21](#) has important things to say in this regard.

B. Lesson Context

Previous lessons from this quarter focused on other aspects of God’s law: his covenant with Israel ([lesson 1](#)), which served as the foundation for the law, and those individuals tasked with ruling on God’s law ([lesson 8](#)). This lesson turns to the details of God’s law for Israel. These laws make up the bulk of Deuteronomy’s content and are a central theme of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament.

The Hebrew word *torah* can mean “teaching” or “law,” specifically God’s laws for ancient Israel. These laws depicted how the Israelites were to live rightly with each other, with their neighboring peoples, and with their God.

Today’s Scripture text comes from Moses’ second address in Deuteronomy to the people of Israel, with the detailed covenant stipulations that God required for his people ([Deuteronomy 12:1–26:19](#)). Moses’ address began with a detailed description of proper worship of God

(12:1–16:17) and continued with descriptions of proper justice in law (16:18–20; 17:8–13), regulations regarding the handling of violent acts (19:1–21:23), and issues of marriage (22:13–30), among other things, as God provided an ordered description of a new society.

For Israel, part of being God’s covenant people was the just and proper treatment of poor and otherwise marginalized individuals. Previously, Moses had reminded the Israelites that poor people would always be part of the population (Deuteronomy 15:11; compare John 12:18). As a result, Moses commanded an openhanded policy toward these individuals, requiring generous giving without resentment (Deuteronomy 15:10). Today’s Scripture expands on this theme.

I. Just Lending (DEUTERONOMY 24:10–13)

A. Respecting the Person (vv. 10–11)

10–11. When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered to you as a pledge. Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you.

Moses described a situation in which a *neighbor*—a fellow Israelite—needed a loan. Elsewhere, the law forbade Israelites from charging interest on loans made to other Israelites (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 23:19–20).

However, lenders were allowed to receive collateral, or a *pledge*, as security for a loan. Even then, certain restrictions remained for what lenders could take as a pledge; taking as a pledge a person’s method of livelihood was forbidden (Deuteronomy 24:6; compare Job 24:3), as was taking a widow’s clothing (Deuteronomy 24:17; see commentary below).

To maintain the borrower’s dignity, the lender was not permitted to enter the borrower’s *house*. Instead, the lender was required to *stay outside* the borrower’s dwelling, allowing the borrower to *bring the pledge out*. In this situation, the borrower controlled what was offered as pledge, with dignity and respect maintained.

As Old Testament history unfolded, the dangers of putting up security, or collateral, came to be recognized, but the practice was not outright banned for Israel (see Proverbs 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13).

B. Respecting the Pledge (vv. 12–13)

12. If the neighbor is poor, do not go to sleep with their pledge in your possession.

The law added extra clarification for loans made to *poor* individuals. Such lending stipulations were required because of the extra vulnerability poor individuals may have faced. Fur-

thermore, the law specifically prohibited lenders from charging interest on loans in these situations ([Exodus 22:25](#); [Leviticus 25:35–37](#)).

13. Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God.

Additionally, lenders were limited on what could be done with a pledge of a borrower's *cloak*. If that was all a poor individual could provide as a pledge, then the lender was prohibited from keeping it overnight (compare [Leviticus 19:13](#)); the clothing had to be returned by *sunset*. This limitation protected the borrower's health during the night ([Exodus 22:26](#)). Lenders were to be compassionate in their lending practices because God is compassionate ([22:27](#); [Psalm 116:5](#)).

The lender's act resulted in two outcomes. First, the borrower would *thank* the lender. One can picture the borrower, preparing for a good night's sleep, offering a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the lender's kindness.

Second, the lender's gesture would be judged by the *Lord* and deemed as *a righteous act*. Such acts were considered right standing in God's eyes and conformed to the demands of God's law and covenant (see [Genesis 15:6](#); [Deuteronomy 6:25](#); [Isaiah 56:1](#); compare [Luke 1:6](#)). God desired his people to live in this manner because his own nature is one of righteousness and justice (see [Psalms 9:8](#); [11:7](#); [33:5](#); [36:6](#); [103:6](#); [Isaiah 33:15](#); [Jeremiah 9:24](#); compare [1 John 3:7](#)). Lending practices as prescribed by the law served as an example of the just and equitable actions the Lord wants his people to pursue, especially toward the marginalized.

What Do You Think?

Is the respect you offer to people poorer than you different from what you offer to those who are wealthier? If so, how?

Digging Deeper

Consider [Matthew 25:40, 45](#). Does this add importance to how you treat the poor? Why or why not?

II. Just Labor

([DEUTERONOMY 24:14–15](#))

A. Oppression Forbidden (v. 14)

14a. Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy,

The concern for justice among the *poor and needy* extended to hired hands. After their experience of slavery in Egypt, Israelites were not permitted to be sold as slaves ([Leviticus 25:42](#)). However, an Israelite who experienced economic difficulty to the point of losing

everything might serve other Israelites as a *hired worker*, or “stranger” (25:35). Such individuals had the expectation of eventually receiving freedom (25:40; see also [Exodus 21:2](#); [Deuteronomy 15:12](#)). The status of such a person is sometimes known as indentured servant.

14b. whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns.

Prescriptions to protect hired hands were enacted to maintain the economic livelihood, dignity, and ability of impoverished individuals, *Israelite* or not, to continue to live among the people of God ([Leviticus 25:35–36](#)).

Most requirements also extended to a *foreigner residing in the towns* of Israel. Qualifying this with “most” admits the exception found in [Leviticus 25:44–46a](#). Without just treatment, these workers could become further marginalized.

God’s people, however, were not to mistreat these individuals. Even in (or especially in) hiring and working practices, God’s people were to practice justice. The most obvious way to do so was through the timely deliverance of wages (next verse).

B. Opportune Wages (v. 15)

15a. Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it.

Workers were paid for their labors at the end of an agreed time of work. However, the hired worker who was *poor* was to receive their agreed upon wages at the end of each day, before *sunset*. This worker, perhaps living a hand-to-mouth existence, depended on such timely pay to provide for daily necessities (see [Leviticus 19:13](#); [Matthew 20:8](#)).

What Do You Think?

What aid does your congregation offer the poor, which would be missed if that support vanished?

Digging Deeper

How do you contribute to that ministry?

15b. Otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

If workers were treated unjustly, it would be within their power to *cry out to the Lord* for help and justice ([Exodus 22:22–23](#); [James 5:4](#)). As failing to return a poor person’s pledge at the end of the day would be considered unrighteous (see commentary on [Deuteronomy 24:13](#), above), withholding pay from a poor person at the end of the day would be considered a *sin*.

Centuries later, the prophet Malachi warned Israel that God would “come to put you on trial ... against those who defraud laborers of their wages” ([Malachi 3:5](#)). God would deal deci-

sively and swiftly with those who did not show justice to their workers.

BEWARE OF OPPORTUNISM!

During the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, an enterprising but unscrupulous couple used the demand for hand sanitizer for their own profit. They traveled to nearby towns and purchased all the hand sanitizer they could find, storing up cases of the in-demand product. They advertised their newly acquired product at vastly inflated prices. While hand sanitizer shortages were prevalent, the couple charged several times the suggested retail! People readily purchased the hand sanitizer at the grossly inflated price. Eventually, the government intervened and redistributed the product to those in need.

During a crisis that necessitated a compassionate response, this couple exploited others for profit and caused an inequitable situation. God **requires** his people to not take advantage of others. While many people see crises as an opportunity for personal gain, God **requires** fairness. What can you do to ensure that you are part of the solution rather than part of the problem?

—C. R. B.

III. Just Community (DEUTERONOMY 24:16–18)

A. Commanding Punishment (v. 16)

16. Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

The principle described here stands in contrast to other law codes of the ancient world. The Babylonian law code of Hammurabi prescribed that if a builder built a house that collapsed, causing the death of the homeowner's son, the builder's son was to be put to death.

In contrast, Hebrew law required certain parameters to allow for just treatment of innocent family members who were vulnerable to harm because of the actions of a relative. The given stipulation would prevent a potentially endless chain of revenge.

However, this principle does not contradict what is found elsewhere regarding God's "punishing the *children* for the sin of the *parents* to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Deuteronomy 5:9). While each person will surely experience the consequences of their *sin*, the repercussions of those sins are often experienced by others. We may think of a parent today who is justly sent to prison for a crime, with side effects of their family suffering destabilization in their relationships and finances.

What Do You Think?

What encouragement can you offer to Christian parents, based on this verse?

Digging Deeper

How would your encouragement change when offered to children of unbelieving parents?

B. Caring for the Needy (v. 17)

17. Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.

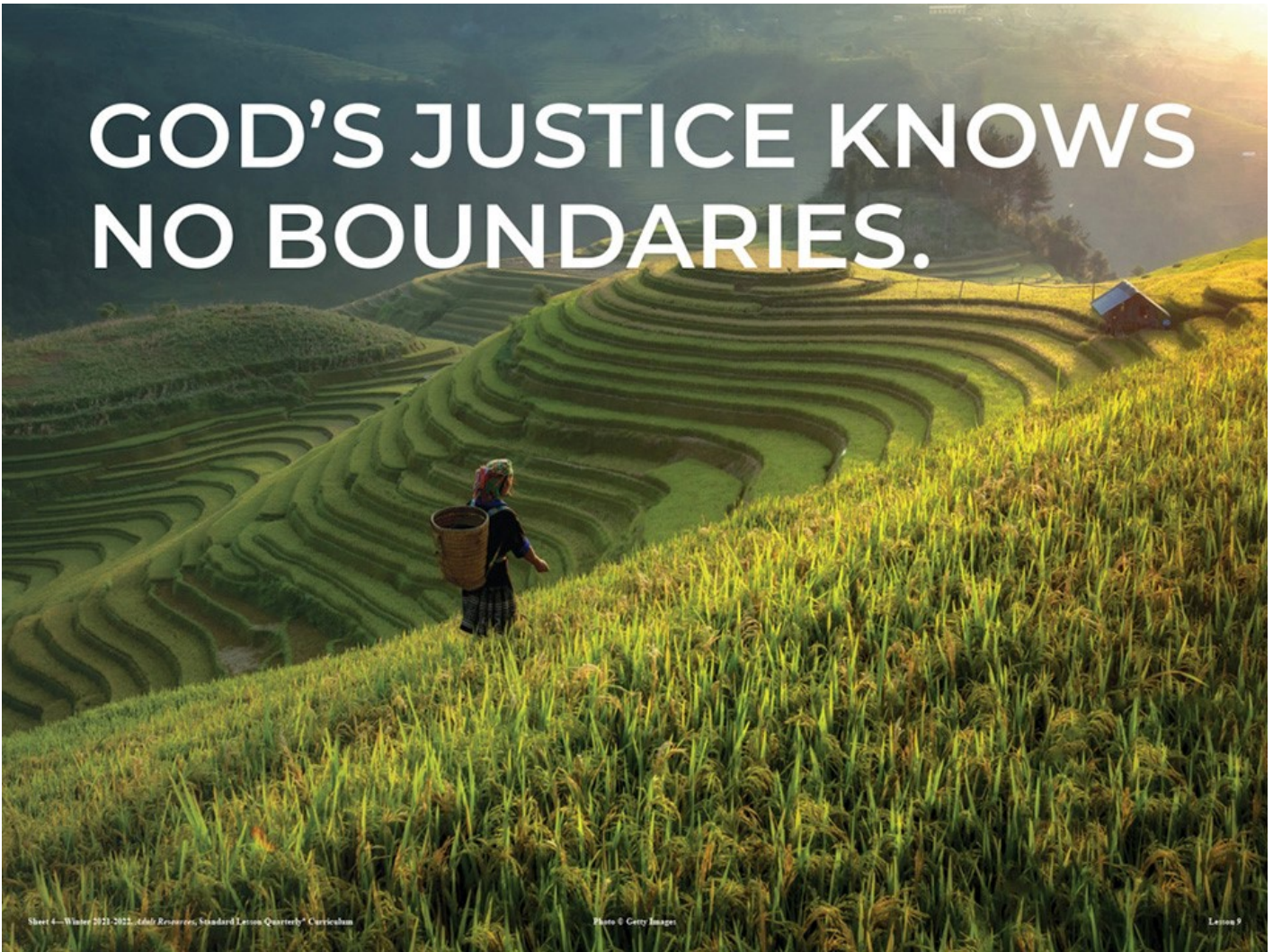
All Israelites were tasked with looking out for the marginalized and the defenseless among them. The Hebrew words translated *foreigner*, *fatherless*, and *widow* occur together in triads in 11 verses in the book of Deuteronomy, emphasizing God's concern for these vulnerable people (see also [Psalms 94:6; 146:9; Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; Ezekiel 22:7; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5](#)).

To *take the cloak of the widow as a pledge* is in the same category as taking the garment of a poor man—*forbidden* ([Deuteronomy 24:12–13](#), above). Furthermore, lenders who had wrongly taken such garments in pledge sometimes worsened the offense by taking those items to pagan worship (see [Amos 2:8](#)).

The law provided numerous reminders to God's people to uphold justice for those who needed it most ([Exodus 23:6, 9; Leviticus 19:33–34; Proverbs 22:22](#)). Concern for these three groups extends into the New Testament as well (see [Matthew 25:35–36; Acts 6:1–5; 1 Timothy 5:3, 16; Hebrews 13:2; James 1:27](#)).

God desires justice for needy individuals and his people are to desire the same. Following God's commands for just living **requires** extra attention to vulnerable people.

GOD'S JUSTICE KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES.



Visual for [Lesson 9](#). Discuss what role Christians play in seeking justice on a global scale. How has that role changed over the past 50 years?

C. Corporate Memory (v. 18)

18. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

Moses reminded the second generation of Israelites of their history as slaves in the land of *Egypt*. That along with God's redemptive act served as the foundation for Israel's identity (see [Deuteronomy 5:15; 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 16:12; 24:22](#)).

The corporate memory of that bondage and their following redemption was to motivate the Israelites to compassionate treatment of the marginalized. That would happen as the Israelites remembered their own suffering and marginalization as slaves in Egypt. To treat others as they had been treated by God was the watchword for Israel (compare [Matthew 18:23–35](#)). They were to remember that *God redeemed* them from that situation and provided justice where injustice reigned.

THE POWER OF MEMORY

A young family, expecting their first child, recently moved in next door. One day the young husband caught my attention and hesitantly asked, “Do you have a battery charger I could borrow?” I said, “Of course,” retrieving the charger from my garage. I told him to keep it as long as needed.

A week later, he brought back the charger and asked why I didn’t hesitate lending it to him. I answered him with a story: “When my wife and I were newly married and had our first son, we were living paycheck to paycheck. My car battery was dying, and I was desperate to get back and forth to work. I asked my neighbor, Harvey, if I could borrow his battery charger. He did not hesitate. I used the charger every night. I wanted to treat you the same way Harvey treated me. That’s why I didn’t hesitate.”

On hearing the story, the young man replied, “That was exactly my situation! Maybe I can help my neighbor someday. Thanks!”

One’s memory serves as a powerful tool for inviting action. For the people of Israel, memory of God’s redemptive acts—especially from bondage in Egypt—served to remind them of how to treat others. How do memories of God’s work in your life shape your behavior?

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What do you remember that helps you keep the Lord’s commands?

Digging Deeper

What can you do to strengthen your memory in preparation for particularly trying times?

IV. Just Harvest (DEUTERONOMY 24:19–21)

A. Regarding Grain (v. 19)

19a. When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow,

In addition to justice in lending practices, justice to the vulnerable was also to be seen in agrarian practices at harvest times. Often the poorer Israelites would work in the fields during the annual harvest time (compare [2 Kings 25:12](#)). The work of *harvesting* was completed with a hand sickle, cutting bundles of grain and binding each into a *sheaf*. Written in terms of what the landowner did *overlook* should have encouraged the underprivileged to boldness in

retrieving the grain accidentally left behind. There should have been no worry that the landowner would later demand it back.

Furthermore, the law made clear that the edges of the fields be left unharvested and only a single harvest occur so that “the poor and *foreigner*” might harvest from the fields for their own sustenance ([Leviticus 19:9–10](#); [23:22](#)). This legislation is seen enacted in the narrative of Ruth, a foreign widow who gleaned the leftover grain from the fields of her Hebrew relative, Boaz ([Ruth 1:22–2:3](#)).

19b. so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

The phrase *that the Lord your God may bless you* occurs three times in the book of Deuteronomy: here and in [14:29](#) and [23:20](#). In all three cases, God’s blessing is contingent on meeting the needs of others. The Lord will bless those who honor his laws and treat the marginalized with respect and compassion (see [Proverbs 19:17](#)).

B. Regarding Produce (vv. 20–21)

20–21. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.

Grape and olive crops were often planted together using a method called polyculture, the practice of growing several crops side by side, which was made popular in the Mediterranean region. Each crop contributed to the health and well-being of the other.

Harvesting olives required that a harvester beat the *branches* of the olive *trees* with a long stick. Most ripe olives would fall to the ground; and any olives remaining on the branches were to be left for the *foreigner*, the *fatherless*, and the *widow*. The same generous harvesting principle was applied to the gathering of *grapes*. What remained following the first harvest was to be left for the needy. The people of God should cultivate not only their crops but also the same kind of generous spirit that the Lord had shown to them.

What Do You Think?

What characteristics of offering your “leftovers” to others make it a respectful act?

Digging Deeper

What should you avoid so that such offerings do not become demeaning?

Conclusion

A. Ignorance and Want, Today

The physical needs of others confront us daily. Applying God’s principles for an ancient culture, where 98 percent of people lived on farms, to our modern culture, where only 2 percent do, is a challenge. But a common-ground starting point is that people of God in all times should live in such a way as to respect the dignity of those in need. Granted, it may take some challenging conversations and creative thinking on our part to apply these principles in specific and helpful ways. This lesson’s Scripture text provides principles of justice that each and every follower of God should model and help enact.

Ignorance and want continue to manifest themselves today. Unlike Scrooge, we should not desire that injustice be hidden from our eyes. Our heavenly Father has made it clear that his heart and his compassion are with those in need. Are ours?

What Do You Think?

What practical help can your congregation offer vulnerable people in your community?

Digging Deeper

What role can you play in either starting or continuing such efforts?

B. Prayer

Father, we pray that you will help us always to see our neighbors as you see them, especially those who are often ignored or treated with contempt. Help us to treat them justly, with the mercy that you have shown us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Remembering how God has treated us
should always govern how we treat others.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class, obtain a deck of playing cards and remove all cards numbered from 5 to 10, leaving only the 28 cards of ace through 4 and Jack through King across 4 suites. Shuffle the

28 cards thoroughly.

As class begins, give each attendee one card and say that no one is to look at his or her card. Review the card values: 2 is the lowest value; ace is the highest value. Explain that each person's card value determines his or her social value for this activity.

Learners should then hold their cards against their foreheads so others can see them but the person with the card cannot. The object is to form community associations with people of "value." Participants must try to discern their relative "value" based on the way others treat them as they mingle; card values are not to be discussed directly. Allow a few minutes to interact; give a one-minute notice for learners to form two groups, according to their similar "values." Then let participants look at their own cards and discuss the experience.

To transition, say, "Society tends to define people's value by outward appearances and status symbols. But let's see if that lines up with how God calls us to treat one another."

Into the Word

Ask three volunteers to read the three segments [Deuteronomy 24:10–13](#), [14–15](#), and [19–21](#) aloud. Divide the class into three groups: the **Lending Group** to consider [Deuteronomy 24:10–13](#)), the **Oppressing Group** for [24:14–15](#)), and the **Harvesting Group** for [24:19–21](#). Give each group a card (you prepare) on which are printed the following questions:

- 1–What are the examples of exploitation and of honoring others in this Scripture?
- 2–What are modern-day examples of exploitation?
- 3–What are modern-day examples of honoring one another?

After small-group discussion, ask a volunteer from each group to report the group's response to the class. Then ask a volunteer to read [Deuteronomy 24:17–18](#) aloud. Reshuffle the groups to be the **Stranger Group**, the **Fatherless Group**, and the **Widow Group**. Write this question on the board for to all groups to answer:

How has the vulnerability of your group's namesake changed since Old Testament times, if at all?

Have one member of each group share their conclusions with the class.

Ask a volunteer to read [Deuteronomy 24:16](#) aloud. As a class, discuss how this prohibition relates to the other commands before and after it. Focus last on its relationship to [Deuteronomy 24:17–18](#). Consult the commentary as necessary to clear up misconceptions.

Into Life

Have the three groups plan a workday to meet some basic needs of the population named

in their groups. They should brainstorm local organizations that can provide guidance and opportunities for appropriate service, then gather information in order to make contact throughout the week. Tell the class that next week the groups will set dates to serve together.

Option 1. Distribute copies of the “Color Coding” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, as a take-home activity. To encourage completion, promise to discuss results and insights gained at the beginning of next week’s class.

Option 2. Distribute copies of the “Examples to Follow” exercise as a take-home activity. To encourage completion, say that you will ask for volunteers next week to share how this exercise challenged or inspired them. Promise also to discuss how the class as a whole can respond in a practical way.