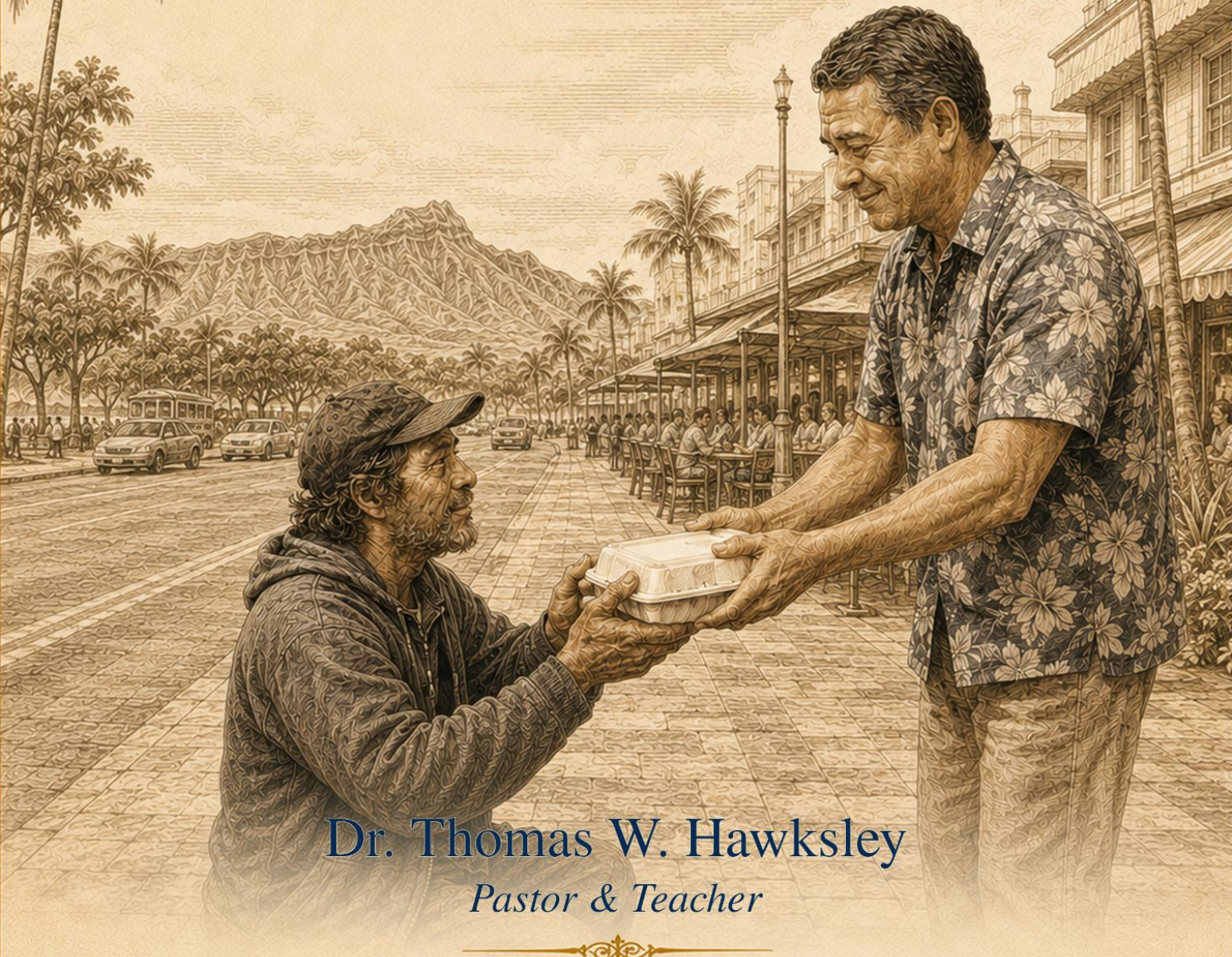


REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE LAZY AND UNGRATEFUL

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-15 | LUKE 6:27-36 KJV

A detailed illustration in a sepia tone. In the foreground, a man with a beard and a baseball cap, wearing a heavy jacket, is kneeling on a paved sidewalk. He is looking up at an older man standing before him. The older man, wearing a floral-patterned short-sleeved shirt and light-colored trousers, is handing a white styrofoam food container to the kneeling man. The background shows a city street with palm trees, parked cars, a bus, and buildings. In the distance, a large mountain range is visible under a clear sky. The entire scene is framed by a decorative border with ornate corner pieces.

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REASON TOGETHER CHURCH
SERMON TRANSCRIPT

The Lazy and Ungrateful

2 Thessalonians 3:6–15; Luke 6:27–36 KJV

Reason Together Church
Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley
www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Aloha,

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

I am genuinely glad that you are here today.

Whether you are with us in the room or joining us online, thank you for opening the Word of God with us.

If this is your first time, please know that you are among friends.

You do not have to agree with everything before you ask an honest question.

You do not have to hide the parts of the Bible that trouble you.

And you never have to be embarrassed because you are wrestling with a difficult question.

Our invitation is the same every week.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Before we begin, let's pray.

Father,

Thank You for giving us Your Word.

Thank You that Your Word speaks not only to the questions that are comfortable, but also to the questions that make us stop and think.

Give us compassionate hearts today.

Give us discerning minds.

Protect us from judging people whose stories we do not know.

Protect us also from calling something helpful when it is actually strengthening what is harmful.

Teach us how to love people without pride.

Teach us how to establish boundaries without becoming hardhearted.

Teach us how to see every person as someone made in Your image and someone for whom Christ died.

Most of all, help us see Jesus clearly.

Let the grace we have received shape the grace we extend to others.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Before we open our primary text, I want to take care of a few family matters.

We do not pass a plate at Reason Together Church.

If you are our guest, there is absolutely no expectation that you give.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to continue giving faithfully through your home church.

For those who consider Reason Together Church their church home, there is a giving box in the back and there are other ways to give if the Lord leads you to do so.

There is no pressure and no compulsion.

The Bible teaches that God loveth a cheerful giver.

Giving is worship, and worship should come from a willing heart.

We are also honored by every guest who has joined us today.

Thank you for trusting us with part of your day.

We have a guest card available, but we only ask for your first name and email address.

That simply allows us to thank you for coming and to make ourselves available if you have a question.

Our Keiki Kids Center is also available for families who would find it helpful.

And after the service, please join us at the Reason Together Café.

The coffee is free.

And so are the refills on the conversations.

The title of today's study is:

The Lazy and Ungrateful.

And our central question is:

Does God tell us not to help certain people, such as the lazy and the ungrateful?

My wife and I go out to eat fairly often.

Sometimes the entire family goes with us.

Probably more often than we should.

Most of the time, there is food left over.

It has become our custom to ask for a to-go box and take the leftovers with us.

Then, when we leave the restaurant, we give that food to a homeless person somewhere nearby.

Here in Hawaii, it is rarely difficult to find someone who might need it.

We do not make a production out of it.

We do not take pictures.

We do not congratulate ourselves.

We do not think it makes us especially good people, and we certainly do not imagine that we are changing the world.

We just do it.

Most of the time, we know absolutely nothing about the person receiving the food.

We do not know how that individual became homeless.

We do not know whether it was caused by the loss of a job, the cost of housing, a broken relationship, mental illness, addiction, poor decisions or circumstances completely beyond that person's control.

We usually do not know the story.

We simply have food that we are not going to eat, and someone else might be hungry.

I also started a nonprofit ministry here in Hawaii that regularly provides food and meals to people in need.

Over the years, I have watched many people come through the line.

Some clearly appear to be struggling.

Others, if I am completely honest, do not appear to me to be in genuine need.

Sometimes I find myself wondering whether a particular person is truly struggling or simply wants something for free.

But that is only my impression.

I do not know that person's complete story.

I cannot see inside that person's home, body, mind or heart.

Because I do not know, we do not turn anyone away merely because of my personal feelings about them.

If food is available, they receive food.

Still, I have wondered more than once whether our ministry might sometimes be hurting people more than helping them.

Are we relieving genuine suffering?

Or are we occasionally making it easier for someone to avoid responsibility?

Are we demonstrating compassion?

Or are we enabling behavior that is keeping someone trapped?

The primary reason I continue when those doubts arise is that providing food also gives me an opportunity to share the Gospel.

A meal may meet an immediate physical need, but the Gospel addresses an eternal need.

Most of the people who attend these food distributions are people I never see anywhere else.

They arrive when food is available, and then they disappear until the next event.

However, there are a few homeless individuals who live nearby and whom I see regularly.

One man often stands beside the road looking for day labor.

He accepts whatever menial work he can find that day.

He may be homeless, but I have repeatedly seen him trying to work.

A couple of other individuals sit on a bench for much of the day, nearly every day.

I have attempted to speak with them, but they have not been willing to have a conversation with me.

I know nothing personal about them.

I do not know how they became homeless.

I do not know what physical, emotional or mental struggles they may be carrying.

I do not even know whether what I think I am seeing is an accurate picture of their lives.

One day, one of our helpers noticed these two individuals coming to receive free food.

The helper asked me a simple question:

"Does God really want us to help people who are lazy and ungrateful?"

I began to give the kind of textbook answer that pastors sometimes give when we think we already know what we are supposed to say.

Then I stopped.

I realized that the question deserved more thought than I had given it.

Does God expect us to help everyone?

Does He expect us to give people whatever they request?

Does Christian compassion require us to continue helping someone who refuses to help himself?

What if the person is ungrateful?

What if our assistance is supporting an addiction or encouraging continued irresponsibility?

How can we know when we do not know the person's story?

That conversation is why I developed this Reason Together Study.

The question is not simply whether we should help the poor or feed the hungry.

The deeper question is this:

Does God tell us not to help certain people, such as the lazy and the ungrateful?

There are two passages that create the tension we need to examine.

Second Thessalonians 3:10 says:

"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."

That sounds direct.

If a person will not work, neither should he eat.

But then Jesus says in Luke 6:35:

"But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil."

That also sounds direct.

God is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

So which is it?

Do we refuse to feed the person who refuses to work?

Or do we show kindness even to someone who is unthankful?

The answer is not found by choosing one verse and ignoring the other.

The answer is found by allowing both passages to say what they actually say.

Before we decide whether someone deserves help, we need to begin with something more basic.

We do not know everyone's story.

Homelessness is a condition.

It is not a character diagnosis.

A person may be homeless while working full time.

A person may be homeless because housing costs rose faster than income.

A person may be homeless because of an illness or disability.

A person may be homeless after the death of a spouse.

A person may be homeless after leaving an abusive home.

A person may be homeless because of mental illness.

A person may be homeless because of addiction.

A person may be homeless because of repeated destructive decisions.

A person may refuse a shelter because the shelter has rules that person does not want to follow.

A person may even say that he prefers the freedom of living outside to the restrictions of a program.

Those circumstances are not all the same.

The word homeless tells us where someone does not have a permanent place to live.

It does not automatically tell us why.

It does not tell us what happened yesterday.

It does not tell us what happened ten years ago.

It does not tell us whether that person tried to work.

It does not tell us whether that person is physically able to work.

It does not tell us whether the person has been grateful to someone else.

It does not tell us what is happening inside that person's mind.

We can observe behavior.

We cannot see an entire life from a bench, a sidewalk or a food line.

That matters because Christians can make two opposite mistakes.

The first mistake is assuming that everyone who asks for help is dishonest.

The second mistake is assuming that everyone who asks for help is completely truthful.

Some people manipulate.

Some people lie.

Some people tell the truth and are still not believed.

Some people cannot explain what happened to them in a neat and convincing way.

Some people have learned that the most dramatic version of their story receives the quickest response.

And some people simply need a meal.

We must not be naive.

But neither may we become cynical.

Discernment is not the same as suspicion.

Discernment tries to understand what is true.

Suspicion begins by assuming the worst.

Compassion is not the same as gullibility.

Compassion sees suffering and refuses to look away.

The Biblical goal is compassion with discernment.

We should not allow the fear of being used to become an excuse for never helping anyone.

And we should not allow the desire to feel generous to prevent us from asking whether our help is actually helpful.

Now let us look carefully at Paul's words in Second Thessalonians.

Turn with me to Second Thessalonians chapter 3.

Beginning in verse 6, Paul writes:

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."

"For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;"

"Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:"

"Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us."

"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."

"For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies."

"Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."

"But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing."

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed."

"Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

The first thing we must notice is the audience.

Paul is speaking about people within the church.

He calls them brethren.

These were not strangers whose circumstances were unknown.

These were people whose conduct had become known within an ongoing Christian community.

The church was not guessing from a distance.

It had enough relationship to recognize a continuing pattern.

That context matters.

This passage gives a church direction for addressing a known and continuing pattern within a relationship.

It does not give us permission to look at a stranger on a sidewalk and announce that he is unwilling to work.

We must know more than a person's location before applying Paul's correction to that person.

The second thing we must notice is the exact wording.

Paul did not say, "If any cannot work, neither should he eat."

He said, "If any would not work."

There is an enormous difference between cannot and will not.

The person who cannot work may need support.

The person who will not work needs correction.

The person who cannot find work may need opportunity.

The person who refuses available work may need accountability.

The person who is overwhelmed may need someone to help carry the burden.

The person who continually places an ordinary responsibility upon everyone else may need to be told to carry it.

Paul was not attacking the sick.

He was not condemning the disabled.

He was not shaming a widow.

He was not telling the church to ignore a hungry child because the child's parent made a bad decision.

He was confronting capable people who had chosen idleness and expected others to maintain them.

Verse 11 says they were "working not at all."

It also says they were busybodies.

They were not merely inactive.

They were interfering in the lives of others while refusing to manage their own responsibilities.

Paul had already given them an example.

He worked with labour and travail night and day.

As an apostle, he had the right to receive support.

But in Thessalonica, he surrendered that right so that no one could confuse ministry with idleness.

He wanted them to see that work possesses dignity.

Work is not merely a way to collect money.

Work is one way we accept responsibility.

Work is one way we serve other people.

Work is one way we provide what is needed.

And for the Christian, work is one way we become able to give.

Ephesians 4:28 says:

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

Notice the progression.

The person begins by taking what does not belong to him.

Then he stops taking.

Then he begins working.

Then he produces something good.

Then he becomes able to give to someone else.

The Biblical goal is not simply to make a dependent person self-sufficient.

The goal is to see a person who once took become someone who gives.

That is restoration.

But Paul's correction was not cruel.

Listen again to verse 15:

"Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

The lazy person was not to be treated as an enemy.

He was still to be addressed as a brother.

The boundary was designed to wake him up.

The correction was designed to restore him.

Biblical accountability does not say, "You are worthless."

Biblical accountability says, "You were made for more than this."

It does not say, "We hope you suffer."

It says, "We will not help you continue destroying the responsibility God has given you."

It does not remove love.

It changes the form that love must take.

And right in the middle of this firm passage, Paul says something we dare not overlook.

Verse 13 says:

"But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing."

Do not become tired of doing good.

Do not allow one dishonest person to harden your heart toward every honest person.

Do not allow one person who refuses to work to make you suspicious of everyone who has lost a job.

Do not allow one ungrateful response to erase the kindness God has placed within you.

Paul confronts idleness and commands continued well doing in the same passage.

That is the balance.

There is another balance in Galatians chapter 6.

Verse 2 says:

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Then verse 5 says:

"For every man shall bear his own burden."

At first, those statements can sound contradictory.

Bear one another's burdens.

Every man shall bear his own burden.

But they describe two different realities.

Some burdens become too heavy for one person to carry alone.

Serious illness can become such a burden.

Disability can become such a burden.

The sudden death of a provider can become such a burden.

A fire, a flood or another disaster can become such a burden.

A family may do everything responsibly and still face something greater than it can carry.

When that happens, the church steps beneath the weight.

We bear one another's burdens.

But each person also has an ordinary load of responsibility.

No one else can permanently obey God for me.

No one else can make every decision for me.

No one else should be expected to carry what God has enabled me to carry.

Christian love helps with crushing burdens without unnecessarily removing ordinary responsibility.

Sometimes a person needs us to carry the load with him.

Sometimes a person needs encouragement to pick up the part he has dropped.

Wisdom is learning the difference.

Now we come to the word ungrateful.

It is painful to help someone and receive no thanks.

It is painful to sacrifice and then be treated as though you did nothing.

It is painful when someone returns only because something else is being given away.

It is painful when a person accepts what you provide but refuses every attempt at relationship.

Gratitude matters.

The Bible repeatedly teaches thanksgiving.

But does a person's lack of gratitude release us from kindness?

Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke chapter 6, beginning in verse 27:

"But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,"

"Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you."

"And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also."

"Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again."

"And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

"For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them."

"And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same."

"And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again."

"But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil."

"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

Jesus could hardly be clearer.

But we should pause over the words, "Give to every man that asketh of thee."

Jesus is confronting the closed hand, the retaliatory heart and the kind of generosity that gives only when repayment is certain.

He is not commanding us to participate in sin or to provide something we know will cause harm.

If someone asks us to purchase what will feed an addiction, love does not require us to purchase it.

If someone asks for something dangerous, wisdom does not become disobedience merely because we refuse that particular request.

The command creates a generous readiness to respond.

It does not require us to grant every request in the exact form in which it is made.

We must never use discernment to empty Jesus' command of its force.

But neither should we use the command to call a harmful gift an act of love.

God is kind unto the unthankful.

Our kindness cannot be limited only to people who respond properly.

If I give only because I expect gratitude, I have made gratitude the price of my gift.

If I serve only because I expect recognition, I am not merely serving the person.

I am purchasing the feeling I want that person to give me.

If I become angry every time someone fails to say thank you, I need to examine why I gave.

Did I give to reflect the character of God?

Or did I give to receive the response I believed I deserved?

That does not mean ingratitude is acceptable.

It means another person's sin does not give me permission to commit my own.

God's kindness to the unthankful does not mean God approves of ingratitude.

God's kindness to the evil does not mean God approves of evil.

Kindness and approval are not the same thing.

You can feed someone without approving of every choice that person has made.

You can treat an addict with dignity without purchasing what feeds the addiction.

You can love a lazy person without pretending that laziness is harmless.

You can refuse a dishonest request without treating the person making it as though he has no value.

This gives us an important principle.

The recipient's attitude may affect the kind of help that is wise.

It does not determine whether the recipient is worthy of human dignity.

Every person bears the image of God.

Every person possesses a soul.

Every person will spend eternity somewhere.

And every person we meet is someone God has allowed to cross our path.

We may not be able to solve that person's life.

We may not even be able to meet that person's request.

But we can refuse to treat that person as invisible.

This is where we must distinguish helping from enabling.

Helping moves a person toward what is good.

Enabling makes it easier for a person to remain in what is destructive.

Helping may relieve an immediate burden.

Enabling may remove the natural consequence that could have produced change.

Helping respects human dignity.

Enabling can quietly communicate that we expect nothing more from the person.

Helping may be generous.

Enabling may also look generous from the outside.

The difference is not always visible in the size of the gift.

The difference is often found in what the gift is helping the person to do.

So perhaps the question is not only, "Am I helping?"

Perhaps we also need to ask, "What is my help helping this person to do?"

Is it helping someone eat today?

Is it helping someone reach a job?

Is it helping someone enter treatment?

Is it helping someone obtain identification needed for employment or housing?

Is it helping someone remain safe for one night?

Is it helping someone move toward stability?

Or is it helping someone avoid responsibility?

Is it helping someone continue an addiction?

Is it helping someone manipulate one more person before moving to the next?

Is it helping someone remain trapped?

Those are difficult questions.

And the answers may be different depending upon the kind of help being offered.

Giving away restaurant leftovers is not the same as assuming someone's rent for the next year.

An immediate meal is not the same as an ongoing financial commitment.

A person does not need to complete an application and prove his moral worth before I hand him food that would otherwise be thrown away.

Not every small act of mercy requires an investigation.

If someone is hungry and I have food, I can provide a meal.

But when assistance becomes repeated, substantial or long term, greater discernment may be necessary.

Relationship matters.

Information matters.

Accountability may matter.

The greater the commitment, the more important it becomes to understand what the assistance is producing.

This is especially important for churches.

A church does not possess unlimited money.

A church does not possess unlimited volunteers.

A church may not have trained counselors, addiction specialists, social workers or housing experts.

A church cannot responsibly promise to solve every problem that arrives at its door.

But a church can still care.

A church can still listen.

A church can still provide a meal.

A church can still pray.

A church can still share the Gospel.

A church can still learn which local organizations are equipped to address needs beyond its ability.

A church can still establish a process that is compassionate, consistent and safe.

Sometimes the wisest help is food rather than cash.

Sometimes it is paying a necessary bill directly.

Sometimes it is a ride to work.

Sometimes it is transportation to a treatment program.

Sometimes it is help obtaining an identification card.

Sometimes it is an introduction to an employer.

Sometimes it is a phone call to a shelter.

Sometimes it is sitting down long enough to hear a story no one else has heard.

Sometimes it is saying, "I cannot give you what you are requesting, but I am willing to help in another way."

That sentence may be one of the most important in this study.

Saying no to a particular request is not the same as saying no to the person.

I can say, "I cannot give you cash, but I will buy you something to eat."

I can say, "I cannot support that decision, but I will help you find treatment."

I can say, "I cannot continue doing this in the same way, but I am willing to discuss a better plan."

I can say, "I cannot give you what you are asking for, but I will not treat you as though you do not matter."

Boundaries do not have to be angry.

Boundaries do not have to be humiliating.

Boundaries can be truthful expressions of love.

But we must also be honest about another danger.

Sometimes we use the word enabling because it sounds better than admitting that we do not want to be bothered.

Sometimes we ask whether a person deserves help when the real issue is that helping would interrupt our schedule.

Sometimes we demand information from a hungry person that we would never demand before wasting the same amount of food at home.

Sometimes our fear of being manipulated costs us more spiritually than the gift would have cost us financially.

I would rather occasionally give a meal to someone who did not truly need it than train my heart to ignore everyone who might.

That does not mean every church must adopt the same policy.

It does not mean every request should receive the same answer.

It means our caution must remain under the authority of love.

Here in Hawaii, this question is impossible to keep theoretical.

We see homelessness near restaurants.

We see it in parks.

We see it near beaches.

We see it beside shopping centers.

We see it outside churches.

We see people carrying everything they own.

We see tents and shopping carts.

We see people who appear strong enough to work.

We see others whose suffering is immediately visible.

We see people who are employed and still cannot secure housing.

We see addiction.

We see mental illness.

We see families trying not to fall one step farther.

And sometimes we see behavior that frustrates us.

Many churches wrestle with how much to help.

Some are afraid that assistance will attract more requests than they can handle.

Some have been deceived so many times that every new story sounds suspicious.

Some want to help but do not know how to do it safely.

Some have generous hearts but no sustainable process.

Some have policies so strict that mercy can barely get through the door.

Others have no boundaries at all and eventually exhaust the people and resources God entrusted to them.

The answer is not a heartless policy.

The answer is not a careless policy.

The answer is a Biblical ministry shaped by both compassion and truth.

When someone asks for assistance, the first question may be whether there is an immediate need involving hunger, health or safety.

If a person has not eaten, the need for food is real even if other parts of that person's life are complicated.

The next question may be what we actually know.

Are we responding to facts?

Or are we responding to appearances?

Then we can ask whether the requested assistance will relieve suffering or strengthen something destructive.

Can the need be met directly?

Can food be purchased rather than cash provided?

Can a bill be paid to the provider?

Can transportation be arranged to a real destination?

Can the person be connected with someone who has the training we lack?

Can continuing assistance include relationship and reasonable accountability?

Can we present the Gospel naturally and respectfully?

And if we cannot meet the request, can we still offer a wiser form of help?

These questions are not a formula.

They are not a test a suffering person must pass before Christians are permitted to care.

They are a framework that helps us slow down, pray and respond wisely.

The framework also protects us from thinking that money is the only form of help.

Sometimes the most valuable thing we can give is time.

Sometimes it is attention.

Sometimes it is honest information.

Sometimes it is an opportunity to work.

Sometimes it is a name remembered the next day.

Sometimes it is a conversation in which the person is treated as a neighbor rather than a problem.

I think again about the man who seeks day labor.

His homelessness does not define his willingness to work.

I think about the two people sitting on the bench.

Their refusal to speak with me does not give me knowledge I do not possess.

They may be lazy.

They may be ungrateful.

They may be afraid.

They may be mentally ill.

They may have been disappointed by so many promises that they refuse to trust another conversation.

I do not know.

And where I do not know, humility should govern what I claim.

I can still observe.

I can still use wisdom.

I can still maintain safety.

But I should not turn an impression into a verdict.

There is a difference between discerning conduct and declaring the worth of a person.

Conduct can be wrong.

The person still matters.

Choices can be destructive.

The person still bears God's image.

The answer to a request may be no.

The answer to whether we should love our neighbor is still yes.

James chapter 2 warns us about a faith that speaks kindly but refuses practical help.

Verses 15 and 16 say:

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,"

"And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Words alone are not enough when we possess the ability to meet a genuine need.

First John 3:17 asks:

"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

Verse 18 continues:

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

Notice those final words.

In deed and in truth.

Love acts.

Love also remains truthful.

Love does not merely talk about feeding someone.

Love also does not call destruction good.

It acts in truth.

Galatians 6:10 says:

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

The verse does not say we can meet every need in the world.

It speaks of opportunity.

God places particular people and particular opportunities before us.

We are responsible to respond faithfully to the opportunities He gives.

We cannot do everything.

But that truth should never become permission to do nothing.

We can offer the food in our hand.

We can support the weak.

We can encourage the person who is trying.

We can confront the person we know is refusing responsibility.

We can remain kind when thanks never comes.

We can establish boundaries when a request would cause harm.

We can partner with ministries better equipped than we are.

And through all of it, we can point people toward Jesus Christ.

But we need to be careful even here.

We should never make the Gospel sound like a price someone must pay before receiving a meal.

We should not say, "Listen to my sermon, and then I will feed you."

The Gospel is not a sales presentation attached to charity.

We offer food because hunger matters.

We offer Christ because the soul matters.

We do both because the whole person matters to God.

The Gospel also keeps us humble.

When we speak of the lazy and ungrateful, it is easy to imagine that we are discussing other people.

But were we always grateful when God was kind to us?

Did we come to Christ after we had repaired ourselves?

Did Jesus wait until we had something useful to offer Him?

Romans 5:6 says:

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."

Verse 8 says:

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

We were without strength.

We were ungodly.

We were sinners.

Christ did not love us because we had made ourselves deserving.

He loved us because love is who He is.

He came into this world.

He lived without sin.

He went to the cross willingly.

He bore the judgment our sin deserved.

He died.

He was buried.

And on the third day, He rose again.

The salvation He offers cannot be purchased by work.

It cannot be earned by generosity.

It cannot be deserved through gratitude.

It is the gift of God received by grace through faith.

But grace does not leave us unchanged.

Titus 2:11 and 12 say:

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,"

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

Grace meets us where we are.

Grace does not approve of everything we are doing.

Grace forgives.

Grace also teaches.

Grace restores.

Grace begins changing a taker into a giver.

Grace begins changing an idle life into a useful life.

Grace begins changing an unthankful heart into a worshipping heart.

That same Gospel balance should shape the help we offer.

We meet people where they are.

We do not pretend that where they are is always where they should remain.

We relieve suffering when we can.

We do not strengthen the behavior causing the suffering.

We show mercy.

We tell the truth.

We offer practical help.

We point toward Christ.

So let us return to the question that began this study.

Does God really want us to help people who are lazy and ungrateful?

Yes, God commands us to love them.

Yes, God commands us to treat them with dignity.

Yes, God commands us to be merciful.

Yes, God is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

But God does not command us to reward laziness.

God does not command us to finance addiction.

God does not command us to accept every story without discernment.

God does not command us to provide everything someone requests.

And God does not permit us to use another person's behavior as an excuse for cruelty or indifference.

The person who cannot work may need support.

The person who will not work may need accountability.

The hungry person may need a meal before we know anything else.

The person making a harmful request may need a loving no and a wiser offer.

The ungrateful person may still receive kindness because our kindness reflects God, not the recipient's manners.

The church may be unable to solve the entire problem and still faithfully do something good.

Biblical compassion and Biblical discernment are not enemies.

They belong together.

Do not allow fear of enabling someone to make you hardhearted.

Do not allow a desire to feel compassionate to make you undiscerning.

See the person.

Seek wisdom.

Meet genuine needs.

Refuse to strengthen what is destructive.

And offer the kind of help that points toward responsibility, restoration and Christ.

The next time you encounter someone who is homeless, resist the temptation to assign an immediate label.

You may be looking at someone who is lazy.

You may be looking at someone who worked all day.

You may be looking at someone who made terrible decisions.

You may be looking at someone crushed by circumstances you cannot see.

You probably do not know yet.

Look carefully.

Listen when possible.

Pray for wisdom.

If you can safely meet an immediate need, consider doing so.

If the requested form of help would be harmful, offer a better alternative.

Do not demand gratitude.

Do not confuse boundaries with rejection.

And do not use uncertainty as an excuse to make another human being invisible.

Perhaps all you have is a box of food you were not going to eat.

That meal may not change the world.

It may not change the person's life.

It may not even produce a thank you.

But it can still be an act of mercy.

And perhaps that small act will open a conversation.

Perhaps the conversation will open a heart.

Perhaps the open heart will hear the Gospel.

We are not responsible for controlling the result.

We are responsible for obeying God with the opportunity He places before us.

If this study has helped you, share it with someone who has wrestled with the difference between compassion and enabling.

Do not use it to win an argument about homeless people.

Use it to begin an honest conversation about how Christians can help wisely.

Ask the question together.

Open the Bible together.

And reason together through the Word of God.

Before we close, I want to speak to anyone who realizes that your greatest need today is not financial, physical or temporary.

Your greatest need is to be reconciled to God.

The Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Sin separates us from God.

No amount of work can erase it.

No act of charity can purchase forgiveness.

No religious effort can make us righteous before a holy God.

But Jesus Christ did for us what we could never do for ourselves.

He died for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

And He offers eternal life to everyone who repents and places faith in Him.

If you are ready to trust Christ today, you can call upon Him now.

The words of a prayer do not save you.

Jesus saves you.

But you may express your faith to Him with a prayer like this:

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that You died for my sins and rose again.

I turn from my sin and place my faith in You.

Forgive me.

Save me.

Make me the person You created me to be.

Thank You for the gift of eternal life.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer sincerely, or if you have questions about salvation, please speak with me after the service.

It would be an honor to open the Bible with you.

If you need prayer, counsel or simply someone to listen, please do not leave without letting us know.

Let us pray together.

Father,

Thank You for being kind to us when we did not deserve Your kindness.

Thank You for loving us while we were yet sinners.

Forgive us for the times we have judged people whose stories we did not know.

Forgive us for the times we called ourselves discerning when we were actually indifferent.

Forgive us also for the times we acted without wisdom and strengthened what was harming someone.

Give us compassion without pride.

Give us wisdom without hardheartedness.

Give us discernment without suspicion.

Give us courage to establish boundaries when boundaries are loving.

Give us generosity when generosity is needed.

Help the homeless individuals and families throughout Hawaii.

Protect those who are vulnerable.

Strengthen those who are working and still struggling.

Bring freedom to those trapped by addiction.

Bring clarity and proper care to those suffering from mental illness.

Convict those who are able to work but refuse responsibility.

Guide the churches that are trying to serve faithfully with limited resources.

Show us what You have placed within our hands.

Show us the opportunities You have placed before us.

And help us use every opportunity to demonstrate Your love, speak Your truth and point people toward Jesus.

In His name we pray.

Amen.

As you leave today, remember this:

You do not have to know a person's entire story before you can show kindness.

You do need wisdom before making commitments that may strengthen destructive behavior.

You can give a meal without congratulating yourself.

You can say no to a request without saying no to the person.

You can remain kind even when gratitude never comes.

And you can trust God with results that you cannot control.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

**PASTOR'S
COMMENTARY
THE LAZY AND UNGRATEFUL**

Does God Tell Us Not to Help Certain People, Such as the Lazy and the Ungrateful?

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; Luke 6:27-36; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Galatians 6:1-10 KJV

“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again... for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.” Luke 6:35

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION The Bible does not create a class of people who are beneath Christian love because they appear lazy or respond without gratitude. Jesus commands His followers to imitate the Father, “for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.” At the same time, Scripture does not require the church to reward known idleness, finance destructive behavior or grant every request in the form requested.

Second Thessalonians 3 addresses a known and continuing pattern among brethren who were living disorderly. Paul says, “if any would not work, neither should he eat.” The controlling word is would, not could. The passage concerns unwillingness within an accountable relationship. It does not authorize a Christian to look at an unknown homeless person and decide, from appearance or visible inactivity, that the person refuses responsibility.

Luke 6 supplies the other necessary truth. Christian kindness is not purchased by appreciation, repayment or moral attractiveness. God is kind to people who do not thank Him. Mercy therefore cannot be reduced to a reward for people who appear deserving. Yet kindness is not the same as approval, and refusing one harmful request is not the same as refusing to love the person.

The local Hawaii setting makes the tension immediate. A meal may be a fitting act of ordinary mercy when little is known. Repeated, substantial or high-risk assistance may require more information, direct payment, boundaries, referral and accountability. The larger the commitment and the greater the possibility of harm, the more carefully the church should ask what its help is helping the person to do.

The approved pastoral posture is neither careless generosity nor guarded indifference. See the person. Separate what is known from what is assumed. Meet an immediate need when it is wise and possible. Refuse to strengthen addiction, danger or avoidable disorder. Preserve dignity when saying yes and when saying no. Offer the Gospel freely, never as the price of food or assistance.

1. The Title and the Real Question

The title, “The Lazy and Ungrateful,” deliberately names two descriptions that often arise when people receive help. One description concerns conduct. The other concerns response. Both can be real, but both can also be assigned too quickly when the giver knows only a small part of another person’s life.

The governing question is, “Does God tell us not to help certain people, such as the lazy and the ungrateful?” The question is broader than homelessness. It reaches church benevolence, family assistance, addiction, repeated requests, employment and ordinary encounters with strangers. Hawaii homelessness provides the local setting, but Scripture must answer the larger question.

2. Why the Question Is Harder Than It Sounds

A quick answer can sound Biblical while ignoring half of the Bible’s witness. One person may quote, “if any would not work, neither should he eat.” Another may quote, “Give to every man that asketh of thee.” If either sentence is detached from its context, it can be made to silence the other.

Faithful reasoning does not choose between compassion and discernment. It asks who is being addressed, what conduct is known, what kind of help is contemplated and what the help is likely to produce. The difficulty is not that Scripture contradicts itself. The difficulty is that wisdom must apply several true commands at once.

3. The Personal Scene Behind the Study

The study begins with an ordinary family habit. After eating at a restaurant, Dr. Hawksley and his family often place their leftovers in a to-go box and give the food to a homeless person nearby. They do not present this as heroic, and they rarely know the recipient’s story. They simply have food that can be shared with someone who may be hungry.

The account is useful because it places the question in real life before it places it in policy. The gift is small, direct and immediate. There is little opportunity to investigate, and the likely use is plain. A meal can be offered without first deciding whether the recipient has made every wise decision.

4. Ordinary Mercy Does Not Require Moral Certainty

The giver of a sandwich or a box of food will usually know very little. The recipient may be unemployed, employed, disabled, ill, addicted, grieving, fleeing violence, newly displaced or living with consequences of personal choices. More than one circumstance may be true at the same time.

God has not made private omniscience a requirement for every small act of kindness. Christians may respond to the need they can reasonably see without pretending to know the whole life behind it. That freedom does not eliminate discernment. It places the amount of required discernment in proportion to the gift, the risk and the relationship.

5. The Ministry Tension

Through an unnamed Hawaii nonprofit, food and meals are also provided at organized events. Some recipients appear plainly in need. Others create the impression that they could provide for themselves but prefer something free. No one is turned away merely because of that impression, yet the question remains: can a ministry with good intentions sometimes hurt more than it helps?

That question is not proof of a hard heart. Stewardship requires ministries to examine results as well as motives. Good intentions do not automatically make every method wise. At the same time, suspicion can become a convenient excuse for withholding mercy. The church must examine both dangers honestly.

6. Three Visible Examples and Three Different Stories

One nearby homeless man regularly seeks day labor and accepts menial work when it is available. Two other people often sit on a bench for long periods and decline conversation. The first example immediately disproves the assumption that homelessness always means unwillingness to work.

The other two examples do not prove the opposite. Their inactivity is visible, but their ability, history, mental condition, opportunities and motives are not. Refusal to converse is also an observable fact, but it does not reveal why they refuse. The Commentary must protect the distinction between observation and verdict.

7. What Is Known and What Is Assumed

Known facts may include where a person is sitting, what the person has requested, whether the person accepted an offered meal, whether a promise was kept or whether a repeated pattern has been directly observed. Assumptions begin when those facts are converted into claims about character, diagnosis or motive without sufficient evidence.

Biblical discernment is not suspicious storytelling. It names what is known, admits what is unknown and makes decisions proportionate to the evidence available. The two people on the bench may be lazy, or they may not be. The responsible statement is that their stories are unknown.

8. What the Bible Means by Sloth

Proverbs speaks plainly about the sluggard. The sluggard delays, refuses effort, invents excuses, neglects responsibility and eventually suffers consequences. Proverbs 21:25 says, “The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.” Scripture does not romanticize avoidable idleness.

Yet Proverbs describes patterns that become known over time. It does not instruct the reader to diagnose strangers from a single scene. A person can be motionless for many reasons. Laziness is a moral description of avoidable refusal, not a synonym for poverty, homelessness, unemployment or visible inactivity.

9. What the Bible Says About Ingratitude

Ingratitude is also real. Luke 17 records ten lepers who were cleansed, but only one returned to give glory to God. Jesus noticed the missing gratitude and asked, “Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?” Gratitude matters because it recognizes both the gift and the giver.

The failure of the nine did not reverse their cleansing. Their ingratitude exposed something spiritually deficient in their response, but it did not prove that Jesus had been wrong to show mercy. A recipient’s thankfulness may encourage the giver, but it is not the measure of whether obedience was worthwhile.

10. The Two Controlling Passages

Second Thessalonians 3:6-15 and Luke 6:27-36 must remain together. Paul corrects known disorder and refuses to make the church responsible for sustaining chosen idleness. Jesus commands generous love and identifies the Father as kind to the unthankful and the evil.

Paul prevents compassion from becoming the support system of rebellion. Jesus prevents discernment from becoming love offered only to the deserving. The final answer must be able to speak both sentences without weakening either one.

11. The Setting of Second Thessalonians 3

Paul is writing to an identifiable church. He refers to “every brother that walketh disorderly” and reminds the congregation of instructions already received. The people involved were not unknown passersby. Their conduct was known within a community that possessed relationship, teaching and accountability.

This setting controls application. Paul is not issuing a street-screening test for Christians to use on people whose circumstances they do not know. He is directing a church in its response to members whose continuing pattern had become established.

12. “Withdraw Yourselves”

Paul commands the brethren to withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not after the tradition received from the apostles. Withdrawal is a form of church correction. It refuses to treat continuing disorder as though it were normal Christian conduct.

The command is relational and disciplinary, not dehumanizing. Later Paul says, “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” The same passage that creates distance also preserves identity, concern and the goal of restoration.

13. “If Any Would Not Work”

Second Thessalonians 3:10 says, “if any would not work, neither should he eat.” The sentence is firm. A person who is able and persistently unwilling to carry ordinary responsibility should not expect the church to make that choice consequence-free.

The verse is often quoted as though it said, “If anyone is not presently working, do not give that person food.” It does not. Paul addresses refusal, not the mere absence of employment. That difference is essential whenever the verse is applied to disability, illness, caregiving, job loss or homelessness.

14. “Would Not” Is Not “Could Not”

A person may be unable to work because of physical limitations, mental illness, age, injury or unavailable employment. Another may be willing to work but unable to obtain enough hours or

enough pay to secure housing in a costly market. Such a person is not described by Paul's phrase "would not."

The Commentary therefore uses a simple controlling distinction: the person who cannot work may need support, while the person who will not work may need accountability. Even that distinction requires facts. It must not be assigned by appearance alone.

15. Paul's Own Example of Work

Paul reminds the church that he and his companions did not eat any person's bread for nothing. They labored "night and day" so that they would not be chargeable to the Thessalonians. Their conduct supplied a visible pattern alongside their verbal instruction.

Paul also says that they possessed the right to receive support. Their labor was therefore not a declaration that every minister must refuse assistance. It was a deliberate example for a church facing a particular disorder. The principle is willingness to bear appropriate responsibility, not pride in needing no one.

16. Busy Without Being Productive

Paul describes some as "working not at all, but are busybodies." The contrast is important. A person may be active, opinionated and intrusive while avoiding useful responsibility. Biblical work is not measured merely by motion. It contributes rather than exploiting the community.

The command that follows is constructive: such people are to work with quietness and eat their own bread. Paul seeks changed conduct. He does not merely want the church to punish hunger. The desired outcome is orderly responsibility.

17. Correction Still Treats the Person as a Brother

If someone refuses the apostolic instruction, the church is to note that person and limit ordinary association so that he may be ashamed. Biblical shame in this setting is intended to awaken conscience, not to supply entertainment for the congregation.

"Count him not as an enemy" forbids contempt. Even when the conduct is known and correction is necessary, the person remains someone to be admonished as a brother. Discipline without dignity would violate the very passage used to justify it.

18. “Be Not Weary in Well Doing”

Between the command concerning quiet work and the instruction concerning correction, Paul says, “But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.” That sentence is easily overlooked when verse 10 is isolated.

Paul does not allow the misconduct of some people to close the church’s hand toward everyone. Disappointment, manipulation and repeated need can exhaust helpers. Scripture acknowledges that weariness while still commanding perseverance in what is good.

19. The Setting of Luke 6

Luke 6 places generosity inside Jesus’ teaching about loving enemies. His disciples are to bless those who curse them, pray for those who mistreat them and do good without building their obedience upon expected return.

The passage therefore reaches beyond ordinary charity. It describes the character of children who resemble their Father. Christian mercy is not merely a strategy for producing appreciative recipients. It is part of the family likeness of God.

20. “Give to Every Man That Asketh of Thee”

Jesus’ words create a posture of openhanded readiness. The disciple’s first instinct must not be a closed hand protected by endless excuses. The command confronts the selfishness that always finds a reason why another person deserves nothing.

The verse does not identify cash as the required answer to every request. Nor does it command a gift that knowingly assists violence, intoxication, fraud or self-destruction. Scripture interprets Scripture. Generosity must remain generous, but love may choose a safer and more useful form of help than the form requested.

21. Kind Unto the Unthankful and to the Evil

Luke 6:35 gives the clearest answer to the ingratitude portion of the question. God “is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.” His kindness is not an endorsement of evil, and His gifts are not earned by proper appreciation.

Christians therefore cannot make gratitude the admission price for mercy. Thankfulness should be taught and welcomed. Its absence may shape a continuing relationship, especially when it joins deception or entitlement, but it does not make a person unworthy of human dignity or neighbor love.

22. Mercy Is Not Approval

A person may receive food without receiving approval for every choice. Jesus could eat with sinners without calling sin righteousness. The Good Samaritan could treat wounds without first solving every moral question about the injured man's history.

This distinction protects both truth and compassion. If every act of help is treated as endorsement, Christians will fear showing mercy. If every act called mercy is assumed to be wise, Christians may participate in harm. Biblical kindness serves the person's good rather than merely satisfying the immediate request.

23. The Gospel Pattern of Grace

Romans 5:8 says, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God did not wait for humanity to become grateful, productive or morally attractive before displaying His love at Calvary. Salvation is grace, not wages for good behavior.

This does not erase repentance. Grace confronts sin and creates a new life of obedience. The Gospel pattern is therefore neither indulgence nor earned mercy. Christ receives sinners as they are and refuses to leave them unchanged.

24. Proverbs Warns Against Supporting Sloth

Proverbs repeatedly connects sloth with poverty, neglected fields, missed seasons and unsatisfied desire. These warnings protect the church from speaking as though personal choices never contribute to need. Sometimes the most loving response must include responsibility, work and consequences.

The warnings are also directed to the slothful person. They are not primarily permission for the comfortable person to congratulate himself while ignoring the poor. Proverbs 19:17 says that the person who pities the poor lends unto the Lord. Wisdom opposes sloth and commands generosity.

25. Deuteronomy and the Open Hand

Deuteronomy 15 commands Israel not to harden the heart or shut the hand against a poor brother. The hand is to be opened wide enough for the need. God directly addresses the internal reasoning by which a person avoids generosity.

The same Biblical law also assumes work, debt, release, community responsibility and ordered covenant life. Openhandedness is not the absence of stewardship. It is stewardship delivered from hardness of heart.

26. Gleaning Joined Provision with Participation

Leviticus required landowners to leave portions of the harvest for the poor and the stranger. The provision was real, but much of it was gathered through the recipient's labor. Ruth 2 shows Boaz adding protection, access, water and deliberate generosity while Ruth actively gleans.

Gleaning should not be turned into a universal rule that every meal must be earned. It does show that compassion can preserve participation and dignity. Assistance may provide opportunity, remove barriers and reward effort rather than merely transfer resources.

27. Work Is Also a Means of Giving

Ephesians 4:28 tells the former thief to labor, "working with his hands the thing which is good." The purpose is not merely private self-sufficiency. He is to have something "to give to him that needeth."

Biblical work moves a person from taking dishonestly to producing honestly and then to sharing generously. The goal of responsibility is not isolated independence. It is the ability to participate in the care of others.

28. First Timothy 5 and Continuing Church Care

First Timothy 5 shows that continuing church support requires administration. Paul distinguishes genuine widows, family responsibility, age, conduct and the church's limited capacity. The instructions are more detailed than a one-time response to hunger.

This supports a scale principle. Immediate mercy may require little investigation. Enrollment in continuing support may properly require relationship, truthful information and clear

expectations. Treating every level of assistance identically is not more spiritual. It may be less faithful to the responsibilities Scripture gives the church.

29. Galatians Holds Burdens and Responsibility Together

Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear ye one another’s burdens,” while verse 5 says, “For every man shall bear his own burden.” The words refer to different kinds of load, but their proximity captures an important pastoral balance.

Some burdens are crushing and should be shared. Some responsibilities properly belong to the individual. Love does not abandon people beneath an unbearable load, and love does not automatically carry what another person is able and obligated to carry.

30. James and John Require Practical Love

James 2 rejects faith that offers pious words while ignoring a brother or sister lacking food and clothing. First John 3 asks how God’s love can dwell in a person who sees a brother in need and shuts up compassion.

These passages prevent discernment from becoming a vocabulary for doing nothing. A ministry may need boundaries, but it must still ask what practical good it can do. Prayer, conversation and referral are valuable, yet they should not become substitutes for available food when food is the evident need.

31. The Bible Holds Several Truths Together

The poor must not be despised. The slothful must not be flattered. The hungry should be fed. Destructive conduct should not be financed. Families bear responsibilities. Churches have responsibilities. Individuals bear responsibilities. Mercy may be immediate, while continuing aid may be ordered.

A faithful ministry refuses to solve this complexity with a slogan. “Always give exactly what is asked” is too simple. “Never help until the whole story is proved” is also too simple. Biblical wisdom seeks the person’s true good under the authority of the whole counsel of God.

32. Homelessness in Hawaii

In Hawaii the question is not theoretical. Unsheltered neighbors are visible near restaurants, parks, beaches, sidewalks and churches. High housing costs, limited supply, health conditions, family breakdown, addiction, employment instability and personal decisions can intersect in one person's story.

The local setting should make the church more attentive, not more confident in stereotypes. Frequent visibility can produce compassion fatigue and the illusion that the observer understands a person because the person is seen often. Seeing someone daily is not the same as knowing the path that led there.

33. What the Oahu Count Can and Cannot Tell Us

The 2024 Oahu Point in Time Count reported 4,494 people experiencing homelessness on a single night, including 2,766 unsheltered and 1,728 sheltered people. The figures establish serious local scale and provide a consistent measure for public planning.

A Point in Time Count is a snapshot, not a complete census of every person who experiences homelessness during a year. It also cannot identify the cause, character or willingness of the individual standing near a restaurant. Population data should inform ministry planning without being preached as a personal diagnosis.

34. Homelessness Is a Condition, Not a Moral Verdict

Housing status tells us where a person is sleeping. It does not by itself tell us whether the person is honest, deceitful, hardworking, irresponsible, disabled, addicted, traumatized, generous or ungrateful. Homeless people possess the same moral complexity found in housed people.

The Commentary therefore rejects two opposite stereotypes. It is wrong to assume that every homeless person is a helpless victim whose choices never matter. It is also wrong to assume that homelessness is normally sufficient evidence of laziness or addiction. Truth must be learned person by person.

35. Addiction Changes the Form of Wise Help

Addiction can create urgent need and serious risk. A gift of unrestricted cash may purchase food, or it may purchase a substance that deepens harm. When there is a reasonable basis for concern, direct assistance can preserve mercy while reducing participation in destruction.

Food, water, transportation paid directly, identification costs, treatment connection and communication with trained providers may be wiser than cash. Refusing cash is not proof of indifference. The key question is whether an alternative form of help is sincerely offered and realistically useful.

36. Do Some People Prefer Homelessness?

Some individuals may refuse a particular shelter, program, rule or placement. That refusal is meaningful, but it does not always mean the person prefers every dimension of homelessness. Safety concerns, pets, partners, possessions, trauma, mental illness, program restrictions or prior experience may shape the decision.

Other people may indeed choose a degree of street life or resist available responsibility. The church need not deny that possibility. It should simply avoid claiming more than it knows. “This person declined this option” is stronger and fairer than “this person wants to be homeless.”

37. Immediate, Repeated and Substantial Help

A useful ministry framework distinguishes three levels of assistance. Immediate help addresses food, water, urgent safety or another small need. Repeated help recognizes a developing pattern and invites relationship. Substantial help creates continuing cost, risk or dependency and therefore requires careful stewardship.

The levels are not rigid legal categories. They remind helpers that a to-go meal and a long-term housing commitment are not the same decision. The depth of information, accountability and collaboration should normally increase with the size, duration and danger of the assistance.

38. Food, Cash and Direct Aid

Food is often a fitting response because it meets an immediate need in a relatively direct form. Cash offers flexibility and can respect agency, but it also gives the ministry less knowledge of use. Neither form is automatically righteous or automatically foolish.

When risk is low and relationship is trusted, cash may be appropriate. When risk is uncertain, a meal, store purchase, bus fare bought directly or payment to a provider may be wiser. The purpose is not control for its own sake. It is to make the assistance more likely to serve the good for which it is offered.

39. Helping Versus Enabling

Helping strengthens movement toward safety, truth, responsibility, health, work, reconciliation or stable support. Enabling removes consequences or supplies resources in a way that allows destructive conduct to continue more easily.

The distinction is not always visible after one encounter. A meal may simply meet hunger. A repeated gift may produce dependence, or it may provide the stability needed for recovery. Ministries should ask not only, “Did we give?” but, “What is our giving helping this person to do?”

40. Why a Consistent Ministry Process Matters

Churches often make benevolence decisions in the pressure of the moment. Different volunteers may promise different things, known patterns may be forgotten and helpers may carry decisions beyond their authority. A simple written process protects recipients, volunteers and the church.

A process can identify available forms of help, cash limits, direct-payment options, emergency procedures, documentation rules, confidentiality, repeat-request review and referral partners. Policy should never replace pastoral judgment, but it can keep judgment from becoming arbitrary.

41. The Place of a One-Time Meal

A one-time meal is small enough that it will rarely require a complete personal history. It may not solve homelessness, addiction or unemployment, but solving everything is not the standard

by which every act of mercy is judged. A cup of cold water remains meaningful even when the larger need continues.

The family practice in the opening story therefore fits the study's conclusion. Give the food respectfully. Do not demand gratitude. Do not announce moral superiority. Do not imagine that the gift has changed the world. Simply recognize a neighbor and share what can be shared.

42. What If the Recipient Is Ungrateful?

An ungrateful response may hurt, especially when the giver has sacrificed. It may also reveal entitlement, anger, shame, mental distress or expectations the giver did not understand. The response should be observed honestly without becoming the whole identity of the person.

The giver can set future boundaries when a pattern includes abuse, threats or manipulation. Luke 6 does not require volunteers to remain in danger. Yet ordinary lack of thanks should not make kindness dependent upon applause. Christians serve under the eye of the Father, not the approval of the recipient.

43. The Gospel Must Never Be the Price of Food

Food ministry creates natural opportunities for conversation, prayer and Gospel witness. That opportunity is a proper reason to continue serving, especially when helpers doubt whether material assistance produces lasting change.

The Gospel must still be offered as grace. A hungry person should never have to listen to a sermon, repeat a prayer or appear receptive in order to receive promised food. Ministry may share Christ openly and lovingly without converting basic assistance into a transaction.

44. How to Say No Without Rejecting the Person

A Biblical no can be clear, calm and respectful. "We cannot provide cash, but we can buy the meal." "We cannot make that continuing commitment, but we can help you contact a provider." "We cannot assist with this request because it may place you or someone else in danger."

The explanation need not become an argument. The helper can preserve the person's dignity, avoid public humiliation and offer a truthful alternative when one exists. Saying no to a request is not the same as saying no to the person.

45. Church Limits and the Value of Referral

No local church possesses unlimited money, housing, clinical expertise, transportation, security or staff. Stewardship includes knowing what the church can do well and where a trained provider is better equipped.

Referral should be more than dismissing someone with a phone number when practical assistance is possible. Churches can maintain current contacts, help make a call, provide transportation when safe or coordinate with outreach professionals. Partnership allows compassion to become more competent.

46. Questions and Clarifications

Does 2 Thessalonians 3:10 forbid giving food to a homeless stranger who appears idle? No. The passage addresses known unwillingness among brethren within church accountability.

Must Christians grant every request exactly as asked? No. Jesus commands openhanded love, but the whole Bible requires wisdom and forbids participation in harm.

Does ingratitude prove the gift was wasted? No. God is kind to the unthankful. Gratitude matters, but it is not the purchase price of mercy.

Can a church refuse cash and still be compassionate? Yes. Direct food, payment to a provider, transportation or another safe alternative may be wiser.

Does homelessness prove addiction or laziness? No. Those conditions may be present in some lives, but housing status alone cannot establish them.

Should repeated help include accountability? Often yes. The greater the commitment, duration and risk, the more reasonable it is to understand what the help is producing.

47. Pastoral Guardrails

Do not preach an unknown person's motives as facts. Do not use the word lazy merely because productive activity is not visible. Do not treat addiction as proof that a person is beyond mercy, and do not give in a form that knowingly strengthens the addiction.

Do not use a recipient's gratitude to prove that a gift was wise, or ingratitude to prove that it was wrong. Do not humiliate a person to display discernment. Do not promise support beyond the church's capacity. Do not make the Gospel response a condition of food.

48. Claims That May Be Taught with High Confidence

Second Thessalonians 3 addresses known disorder in a church relationship. "Would not work" means unwillingness, not inability. Paul joins firm correction with continued well doing and brotherly treatment.

Luke 6 teaches kindness that is not conditioned upon repayment or gratitude. Scripture commands practical care for the poor while also affirming work, family responsibility, ordered church support and personal accountability.

Housing status alone cannot establish laziness, addiction, dishonesty or unwillingness. The Gospel is freely offered and must never be made the price of assistance.

49. Claims That Must Remain Conditional

A particular person may be unwilling to work, but that conclusion requires knowledge of ability, opportunity and conduct. A particular request may finance addiction, but concern should rest upon reasonable evidence rather than stereotype.

A direct gift may be wiser than cash in many situations, but circumstances vary. A declined shelter or program may reflect resistance, or it may reflect safety, eligibility, relationship or mental-health concerns. The Commentary preserves these as case-specific judgments.

50. Claims That Should Be Rejected

The Commentary rejects the claim that Paul commands Christians to withhold food from every stranger who appears idle. It rejects the claim that Jesus requires cash for every person who asks. It rejects the claim that compassion requires participation in known harm.

It also rejects the claims that every homeless person is merely a victim, that homelessness is usually proof of laziness, that ingratitude erases dignity or that saying no to one request releases the Christian from the command to love.

51. Source Notes for the Pastor

The primary authority is 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 and Luke 6:27-36. Deuteronomy 15:7-11, Leviticus 19:9-10, Ruth 2, Proverbs 6:6-11, Ephesians 4:28, Galatians 6:1-10, 1 Timothy 5:3-16, James 2:14-17 and 1 John 3:16-18 provide the wider Biblical framework.

The Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions Point in Time Count page and the May 15, 2024 Hawaii Governor's release support the Oahu snapshot used in this Commentary. The Hawaii Department of Human Services publishes the annual reports and methodology.

HUD's Market Predictors of Homelessness explains how housing and community conditions shape local homelessness rates. SAMHSA's homelessness resources support the need for trained treatment and service partnerships when behavioral health or substance use is involved.

Local program contacts, eligibility rules and statistics can change. They should be reverified before a resource card, church policy or public handout is produced. Government data establishes scale and service context. It does not define the character of an individual.

52. Gospel and Ministry Application

The Gospel reveals a Savior who did not wait for sinners to become deserving. Jesus received the rejected, confronted sin, fed the hungry and gave Himself at the cross. Those who trust Him are saved by grace and then called into a life of truth, work, generosity and mercy.

For ministry, the application is practical. Carry food when possible. Learn the names and stories of people who welcome relationship. Build a consistent benevolence process. Know local partners. Set boundaries without contempt. Continue sharing Christ even when material results are difficult to measure.

53. Final Pastoral Summary

The approved interpretation keeps compassion and discernment together. Immediate mercy does not require proof that a person has made every wise choice. Continuing support may properly require truth, relationship and accountability. Direct aid may be wiser than unrestricted cash when harm is a reasonable concern.

The day laborer warns against equating homelessness with laziness. The two people on the bench warn against turning repeated observation into a complete story. The food events warn that

generosity can become enabling. Luke 6 warns that fear of enabling can become an excuse for withholding kindness.

The permanent ministry question is not merely, “Did we help?” It is, “What is our help helping this person to do?” The answer should move toward safety, responsibility, restoration and the dignity of a person made in the image of God.

54. Final Commentary Conclusion

God does not tell Christians to stop loving people because they are lazy or ungrateful. He does tell the church not to make peace with known idleness, deception or destruction. Biblical mercy is generous, and Biblical love is truthful.

A meal can be given without a trial. A repeated commitment can include accountability. Cash can be refused while useful help is offered. Ingratitude can be recognized without becoming bitterness. Unknown motives can remain unknown.

The final answer is therefore neither an automatic yes nor a hardened no. See the person. Tell the truth. Meet genuine need when possible. Refuse to strengthen harm. Preserve dignity. Offer Christ freely. Then be not weary in well doing.