

June 5/6, 2021

Margin for the Marginalized

Deuteronomy 24:10-22

Pastor Josh Luse

We are really looking forward to the start of our series in Judges next week. Bryan will be starting us off with that. But before we dive into that, we're going to be in Deuteronomy, Chapter 24. This morning, if you have your Bible, you can join me there, and I'll kick us off with this. I want to explain why I'm wearing and repping the Kids' Ministries shirt this morning, and that's because we have two huge events that take place in our church over the summer that invest in the next generation. One of those coming up in July is our Vacation Bible School, VBS. And in that week, we will have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of students pour into this place. And we get the opportunity to care for them, to love them, and to share the message of the gospel with them. And so we want to invite you to join with us in helping serve and be a part of that week. If you go onto the website, under the Kids Ministry, you can scroll down and find information about VBS and also ways that you can serve—being a table leader, or helping with snacks, or being a runner. There's a variety of different opportunities. So we encourage you to join in with that. Secondly, today, right now, our middle school and our high school students are out at summer camp in Minnesota. Often, camp can be one of those most deeply impactful things in the lives of students. So, we want to take a second this morning, as a church family behind them, to pray that God would continue to work in their lives. Would you join me in prayer?

Father, thank You so much for a church that has loved and cared for and valued students for years and years and years. God, thank You for the fruit that has come out of people giving their lives to pour into the next generation. Father, we pray that as VBS approaches, God, that You would continue to use that week as a way that continues to point kids to Jesus and establish a foundation upon You. God, we pray for our high school and our middle school students, for the cabin leaders, and for the staff that are at camp right now. God, would You continue to do a huge work in the lives of those students, God, when they come back this week, changed and passionate to follow You with all their heart? God, would you open our hearts to Your words in Your Scripture this morning? Would You speak to us right where we're at? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

You know, growing up, my family had a little bit of a tradition that we would do. Oftentimes over Christmas break, my mom would get a puzzle. She'd set up a little card table and we would, over the Christmas and New Year's, put this puzzle together, piece by piece. Sometimes we'd take little sections as a family and kind of work on it. Somebody would work on the borders. And, as we grew older, the puzzle would get more and more pieces added to it. And then one year, I remember we got all the way to the end of the puzzle and we're missing one piece. There was something about putting in that last piece of the puzzle. We found out that somebody had taken a piece during our building period and stuck it in their pocket, so they could put in the last piece of the puzzle. I can tell you've worked with these kinds of people as you've done puzzles too. Well, that's

something that kind of caught on. So, everybody started kind of taking pieces and putting them in their pocket or hiding them in places, so that they could come back at the end and put it in. Well, there was a little problem with that. Over the break, some of us would forget where we had put that puzzle piece. I don't know if you've ever gotten to the end of a 5000 puzzle-piece puzzle and you don't have all of the pieces to complete the puzzle. I don't know of anything more frustrating! That's why I would never buy a puzzle at a garage sale. Absolutely not, right? Inevitably, that puzzle piece had been lost or forgotten. It had fallen into the cracks in the couch, or into the vent, somewhere obscure. Maybe the dog had even chewed it up. And that image, that puzzle that we were trying to create, was broken. It wasn't a whole. There were still things missing. It's a little bit of what we want to talk about this morning in Deuteronomy, Chapter 24, and I'm going to start in verse 10, where it says this:

“When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not go into his house to collect his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you. And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge. You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. And it shall be righteousness for you before the LORD your God.” (*ESV, Deuteronomy 24:10-13)

Now, we're diving right into the middle of the book of Deuteronomy, and as we study Scripture, it's always important to understand the context of the passage in the book that you're studying. So, a little history lesson. You remember God created a perfect world, and in His image, He created man and woman. And Adam and Eve decided to step out of God's design, pursue their own desires, and went outside of the boundaries, and sinned. And from there, the image of God's world was broken. It was distorted. But God did not leave us there. He devised a plan to rescue us and that came through Abraham, a man that He had chosen to bless, and to bless the world through him. Abraham had a son, miraculously, Isaac. Isaac grew and had a couple sons. One of them, named Jacob, whose name later became Israel, and he had twelve sons that became the twelve tribes. And as those families continued to grow, they were taken to Egypt. After a while the nation grew larger and larger, and the Egyptians there got scared that this nation would somehow overtake them. And so what did they do? They put them in bondage. They enslaved them so that they would not overtake them. But God redeems and rescues them out of Egypt, takes them to Mount Sinai, and starts to give them some laws on how to govern this community.

Now, it's important to think through this. You can't think through laws in the Old Testament with the Israel people in the same way that you would think of laws here in America. It's a different culture, a different time, and a different place. And these laws were brought into a current society with current customs and current cultural norms. And so God started bringing in these laws around those norms that would govern them to be a different people, a people that were set apart. And as He shared these laws, Deuteronomy starts telling us what these laws look like for them to live out their culture at this place. And whenever we read these laws, we have to think, *“What was God's intention around this law that we can carry through today for us?”* So he says,

“When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not go into his house to collect his pledge.”

Now, obviously, there were no banks at this time, when you think through this culture. There's no contract you can go and sign. And if somebody needed a loan, it wasn't so they could add on to their house, right, or buy the boat, or whatever. Loans were needed for survival—for food, or for shelter, for livestock—things that they needed on a day-to-day basis. So, what would they do? They would go to their home and get something that they could put in as a pledge for the loan, so that when they repaid it, they would return that pledge back to them. But obviously, if somebody needed a loan in this setting, they were in a little more of a difficult spot. So what did God set up as a law? What's His intention? He wants to provide continued dignity for that person that is in need. As they are in need, He says, “Hey, stop outside. Don't go to their home. Wait for them to go figure out what they can give, and bring it back out.” He's also looking out for us because of how often we forget what it feels like to be in need. And we can often take that position of power, and go into that setting, to use that against the person that is in a place and in a position of need. So, He starts to protect them. He starts to put laws around to govern their society that help give them an understanding of how to move forward. In verse 12, He says, **“If he is a poor man...”** I want to stop there because scholars have often talked about this “quartet of the most vulnerable” all throughout the Old Testament. And there were four different people that were named—and they'll be named through this passage—that start to show those that had the most need, the most marginalized in society there. And one of them was *the poor*. He says, **“If he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge.”**

Now, you notice this is the second time we've seen **shall not**. Maybe your translation says, “do not”. There's an intensity within these laws that God has given the children of Israel. There's a purpose, and it should not be broken. He tells him that **you should not sleep in his pledge**. Now this is interesting. So he's given us the description. This man is a poor man. And if he's given me his pledge, what's it talking about? Well, the next verse explains what that is, **“You shall restore the pledge to him at sun set, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you.”** Verse 17 would use the same terminology of “garment”.

Essentially, there was an undergarment and there was an outer garment that they would wear. And so if a poor man needed a loan, and they were going to give you the outer garment, they obviously didn't have a lot of other things that they could give. So he says, “Hey, before they go to sleep, you should return that to him.” “Why?” “Because if you don't, they have nothing to cover themselves with. They have nothing to keep them warm. Why would you take that home? Why would you disadvantage somebody that's already disadvantaged?” It would be similar to me going downtown to go to work and I continue to see this gentleman that you can tell is in a hard position. And he comes up one morning and says, “Hey, I've got my sleeping bag. Can I get ten bucks? I've got a job lined up. I'm going repay you. When you come out of work, I'll pay you back the money; you can give me the sleeping bag.” Why would I take that sleeping bag home to my house, with my blankets and cover myself, while they would go and sleep in the cold? God is setting the standard here. Now, obviously, it's completely different in this society. There's no social system to help care

for them. There's no way that they can go anywhere else. And so He sets up a standard that you should restore this pledge, and before the sun sets. Why? **It shall be counted righteousness for you before the Lord.** Again, He goes on to give us the heart and the reason for this, because God is trying to establish within His people a life of worship to Him.

And their worship was connected to everything that they did. Every year He told them, "You should give a tenth of what you make to the temple, as this is a part of your worship to God." Every three years He told them, "You should take a tenth and give it to the poor, to the oppressed." In fact, He set up another law that every seven years, those that are in debt, "You should free them from their debt." Why? Because He's trying to show them that what you do, and how you live, and the actions you take are part of worship to Me. They're a picture of worship to Me. Deuteronomy chapter 15 gives us a little glimpse of this, as we see those in need around us. Verse 7 says this:

"If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you should open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be." (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)

Now, look at what we're gonna wrestle with in that moment. Verse 9:

"Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and all that you undertake. (Why? Verse eleven:) For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy, and to the poor, in your land.'" (Vs. 9-11)

He's trying to show them the way that they care for the marginalized is an act of worship to God. It's an act of the way that they live out this righteousness, the standard that God has set up to accommodate for those around them in need. And in that, they're actually worshiping God. It goes on in verse 14 to say:

"You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns. You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD and be guilty of sin."

(Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

See a contrast that He's just talking about earlier in verse 13 and now in verse 15. In one spot I do as God's asked me to do, and this person is thankful in Christ the Lord, because of your righteousness. And in another, I allow my selfishness, if I don't pay out at the time where it's

needed, to cause hardship, and cry against the Lord and shall reveal my sin that has taken place. Now, again, in this time, there's not a paycheck that I get, that covers the next two weeks. When I work, I get payment, and that takes care of the needs that I need for that day. These are small family farming societies. It's not like I'm making a huge bank that I can live off of. So he's already given us a glimpse in verse 15. It says he's poor, and he counts on it. When I know the need, He's asking them then to pay for that person at the end of the day, so they have what they need as they go home.

Now, for some of us, that could mean something a little broader even. All of us are asked to be good stewards of the resources and the time and the treasure that we have, but some of us have been given opportunity to steward other people as well. And God is putting on us the opportunity to look out for those around us. It could be in our businesses, could be our place of work. There are opportunities that we have to care for those around us, that ties into our worship to God. In verse 16 He goes on and says this:

“Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, (I was really happy to see that verse when I read it), nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.”

Again, remember the context of what's happening in this. Just decades before, they had been slaves in Egypt. They have no home. They have no land. The food they're given, they don't have much control over. Somebody comes in and wants to take someone out of their family or wants to take someone's wife out and abuse them, they have no power against that. In fact, those that are watching over them, can punish them at will. There is no standard of justice. It's just up to what they're feeling. And we read throughout Scripture that the children of Israel were oppressed; they were punished. Punishment was cruel. It was overbearing; it was inconsistent. There's no standard, and often around this time, in other nations, it was all the same. Punishment would come. It would be vindictive, or it'd be out of vengeance. So, God is setting a standard, saying that there has to be a standard of justice. A standard of punishment that would take place has to be consistent. So what goes on? He says in verse 17:

“You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in a pledge,”

Now we're seeing a second word that's really key in this passage. The first one we kind of breezed over. It was up in verse 13 and it was “righteousness”. The Hebrew word for this is *Tsedaqah*. It's a standard for a right relationship. You may remember as we studied through Psalms and through Proverbs, Bryan would often speak of the righteous—the *Tzedek*. It's the same form of this word, and righteousness sets a standard for a right relationship. Often we just think of this as morality. But righteousness is always in the context of a relationship. So, as I live out righteousness, it's not maybe that I live honestly, and that moral value is important. It's how it affects and impacts the relationships around me. Because if I don't live out that right standard in that relationship, and I

have dishonesty, it starts to wreak havoc on that relationship. It starts to break down that relationship. So what He's saying is, there is a standard of a right relationship.

But then He says another word—justice. The Hebrew word for this is *Mishpat*. You might remember this. It was just mentioned earlier in Acts 10, in our study through Acts as well. *Mishpat* is the action that comes from that standard. It's the way that we live out or carry out the standard that's been put in place. So, if righteousness sets the standard for the right relationship, justice or *mishpat* acts out that standard. There's a lot of different ways this is used throughout the Old Testament. There's a corrective *mishpat*. If somebody does something wrong, with punishment that should be placed on them. There's a proactive *mishpat*. There's a way of looking at the society at large and advocating or setting up laws or systems to help with the flourishing of the whole community. But there's another kind of *mishpat*, and that's restorative *mishpat*. And when we read through the Old Testament, nine times out of ten, what's being spoken of is the restorative *mishpat*—restorative justice—making other people's problems my problems. It's looking out for the most vulnerable, for the most marginalized, most forgotten in this society. And here we see another group that is listed in this way. It says you should not pervert the justice—the *mishpat*—due to the sojourner or the fatherless or take the widow's garment in a pledge.

Now here's the rest of our quartet of the most vulnerable that was talked about in this society at this time—the sojourner. Maybe your translation says *stranger*, *alien*, or *immigrant*. Stranger is not the guy coming up in the white van saying, “You want some candy?” That's not it! Alien is not the thing coming down from outer space, right? These are outsiders that are coming into the land. Now, again, remember, how are they going to live? How are they going to survive? It's either going to be around a family, or it's going to be with land, a possession of land, an inheritance. These outsiders are coming without either of those. Or he talks about the orphan or the fatherless. Or he talks about the widow.

Now also remember, this is a patriarchal society. In this society, often all throughout the Old Testament, you see an identity linked to the father's name. Why is it? Because in the culture at that time, that's how they would continue to protect and provide for these family clans, for these extended families. A father would be in charge of the whole clan. They would have an inheritance of land. They would continue to use that to care for and take care of their family. And they would provide protection from other clans or families coming in against them. And as they had a daughter, she would be under the protection and provision of that father. Now at some point, she would get married. And as she got married, she would move permanently out of that family, out of that clan, into another family, another clan. And now she was under the protection and provision of that family with her husband. And if she had a son, that son would then be in charge of taking care of her as she got older, in the years where she couldn't. There's constantly a provision and a protection that was there in that society through that system. Now, what happens if her husband dies? What happens if she has no son? She can't go back to the family she grew up in. She is in a really hard spot. So what's God's heart? Notice the difference that He talks about here? You can't take her garment in a pledge. You have to look out for her and provide for her. He's setting up a standard of a right relationship. Why? Verse 18:

“...but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.”

Remember that you know what it feels like to be the outsider. You know what it feels like to have no protection, no provision. You know what it feels like to be oppressed. So, therefore do this. And He gives the action of justice in verse 19:

“When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”

Remember back in his covenant to Abraham, that he told him He would bless him so that he could be a blessing. He goes on in verse 20:

“When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.”

Now we continue to see this language before it's actually a term of ownership. So ultimately, Yahweh owns this land. We see that in Deuteronomy 26. That's very clear. And then He tells them that there's a portion of it that is given to the most vulnerable. Now it's not to say He's going to disadvantage the farmer. Deuteronomy, Chapter 23:24-25 sets up a standard so that the farmer does not get taken advantage of as well. He's not trying to create justice by injustice. He's trying to create a whole picture for the whole community. Verse 21:

“When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.”

Now why all of this talk about grain and barley and olives and grapes? What is He trying to accomplish? What's the intention? Remember, this is a farming society. The way that they survived was through their grains, through their fruits, through their livestock. When we look at the wheat and barley harvest, this was central to the calendar of the Israel people. It would have been a whole community thing. And as they went about to reap and pull in this harvest, Leviticus chapter 19 actually tells us to leave a margin around it. To sustain life in their normal patterns of life, they were to leave space for the most vulnerable in their society. This was a very versatile food. They could do a lot. It was a staple within their diet. Olives were a staple as well. They could use the olives for olive oil. In fact, historians have told us that olive oil from this area would be taken all the way down to Egypt, and all the way up possibly to Greece. It was something they could bank a lot of money from, because it was valuable. But they're supposed to leave a margin. When they go to glean from the olive trees, and they take their first crop, when they go back, they're not supposed to beat them a second time. What grows then is to be for the most vulnerable, the least of these. And the wine, the wine was known from Canaan. Remember the spies going in and the grapes that they found? And yet, Leviticus chapter 19 again tells us not to pick up the grapes that

have dropped on the ground, and even to leave the smaller clusters, because those were for the most vulnerable. What's interesting is the harvest times of all these foods. Barley was harvested in the spring, wheat in April, grapes and fruit was in the summer. All those were harvested in late August to late October. It's as though He's saying, "Hey, in all the work that you do, I'm trying to set up a pattern of margin in your life. So as you live life, you're worshiping Me by caring for the least of these. It's a part of your natural rhythms."

Now, why do it this way? We would say in America, they should go and try to get the most that they could get out of it and then come back and give after that. They should try and get all the field and sell it, all the olives and sell it, and then come and give. But He's saying, "No, look at it a different way. Don't look at it as what I can give. Look at this as what should I keep." And when I start to do that, it starts to hit me in a totally different way. Then I start to look at my time and say, "*What should I keep for myself?*" I start to look at my resources and say, "*What should I keep for myself?*" I start to look at the jobs that I've been gifted to do and think, "*What part of those jobs should I do for myself and what could I still use to help for the least of these?*" He's saying, "In your rhythms of life, look out for others." Why? Because everyone is created equally in God's image. According to God's original design, everyone in this society, even the most marginalized, are valuable to our God. CS Lewis, in *The Weight of Glory* said it this way, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked with a mere mortal; it is immortals with whom you joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit." Why should they do this? Again verse 22:

"You shall remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this."

Remember, what God has done for you. Sandra Richter says it this way, "I was a slave. I was in bondage. I was without value until the day Yahweh found me. He heard my cry, He remembered His covenant, and He set me free. We Christians use this language to communicate the profound transformation that we experienced on the day we said yes to Jesus. Before the children of Abraham, these were not metaphors." This was a reality for him. We have to remember, it's not our job to complete the work of justice. That is God's. But we are not free to ignore it. And we have to create margin in our lives, to continue to lean into it. So, as we look around Lincoln, and we try to look at God's picture for the flourishing He's trying to create within our community, what pieces of the puzzle are still missing? What has fallen through the cracks? Where are the most vulnerable among us? Isaiah 1:16-17 in the paraphrased version in *The Message*, says this:

Learn to do good.

Work for justice.

Help the down-and-out.

Stand up for the homeless.

Go to bat for the defenseless. (*MSG, Isaiah 1:16-17)

As a church, there's a ton of different ways that we can do this. One of those ways would be caring for those families and those kids that are among us—the most vulnerable—much like what Jeff and Annie did. I want you to check out this story.

[Video testimony]

Annie: I would say when we first were introduced to it, we knew nothing about foster care. It was something that we really had to just take one step at a time.

Jeff: So we started with respite, which is just kind of helping out other foster parents over the weekends or when they're traveling. You know, after a few of those, then you kind of start building up some courage and then...

Annie: ...some confidence.

Jeff: Then we were a little more ready for a placement. We got a call for another boy, and he's three years old. It's still chaos, but it's somehow all kind of meshing together. And just to see the belly laughs in the backseat with our kids. And he just, he's just making us all smile and laugh, and it makes it all worth it. (Inaudible-children's happy noises in the background)

Annie: (laughs) And, you know, I drove up for the first time to meet him and he was actually... they opened the car door, and I looked at him, and I was just like, "*Oh my goodness, like, I love you.*" I'm so thankful that we're on this journey because it's given us so much.

Jeff: It really unveiled God's love a lot more, just because understanding that adopted love, that it's not this natural bond that you have with your biological children. It's this stuff you have to like cultivate and keep working on. We just see all the blessings God's given us and we don't want it to stop at our doorstep. We want it to keep flowing.

Annie: And just opening our home, even when it's chaotic, and it's messy, it's just that this is what we're called to do, like God calls us to be His hands and feet and to serve others and love others. And we don't always want to. There've been many times where we've wanted to say no, just pretend we didn't hear His voice. But it's really neat to see those twists and turns and how they have really kind of shifted into a different picture, and a beautiful picture that we never, never could have imagined.

[Interview with Megan Kuehl]

Josh: Because this is living out what we're talking about this morning, I've invited Megan up here to talk a little bit more. Megan works with our local and our global outreach. She's a part of our team here at Berean, and specifically we want to talk about our local outreach today. And it won't be long here, Megan, before I'm going to have another introduction for you as well. How much longer are we talking?

Megan: Just about five weeks.

Josh: Five weeks, and Eric and Megan will have their first child, and we're really excited for them. (clapping) So, Megan, this is the heartbeat of our church. This is what we want to be about. And one of the ways that we accomplish this is through our local partnerships. But when we say local partnerships, what do we mean by that?

Megan: Yeah, Josh. We're so blessed in Lincoln to have so many nonprofits that are being the hands and feet of Jesus every single day. But we also believe that God requires His people to pursue justice by caring for the poor, the orphan, the immigrant and the widow, while making disciples by proclaiming the good news of the gospel. But we acknowledge that in order to reach certain populations of our community, we have to utilize organizations that are outside of our church. And so, therefore, we commit a portion of our finances to 18 different organizations that are in the Lincoln area.

Josh: So every week, as we give in our offering, a portion of that goes to eighteen different partnerships around us. That's one of the corporate ways that we do this collectively together. But, Megan, what are some of the individual ways that we actually can partner individually, even maybe over the summer with some of our local partners?

Megan: Yes. So, as you walked in, you should have gotten a card that looks like this. And if you didn't, grab one as you leave. They're at the Connecting Point. I wish we could talk about all eighteen, but we're just going to touch on five today. And I'll give an overview, but then also some really practical ways that we can serve with them this summer. And so the first one is *Christian Heritage*. The mission of Christian Heritage is to offer a holistic, Christ-centered approach to caring for children from hard places in Nebraska. They seek to prevent neglect and abuse, protect children, and restore families, and they do that in a variety of ways. One is through tangible needs, which is through their *Care Portal*. They also provide temporary care with their *Families Together* program. They help provide children a safe, loving foster family, like you saw on the video. They also teach practical parenting and life skills to incarcerated moms and dads.

Josh: Pretty incredible! We just saw one piece, and you can see more videos at their website too. But, Megan, you mentioned *Care Portal*. I feel like this is some portal I step in and tell the portal to care for somebody? What's the "Care Portal"?

Megan: The Care Portal is actually all across the state of Nebraska. But here in Lincoln, there's a couple churches that partner with Christian Heritage to meet tangible needs for families. So social workers can post these needs on this website. And some of those needs look like donating diapers to the family who needs it. It could be a foster family that takes in an infant and they need a crib donated, or it could also be helping with rent assistance to keep a family in their home. So a lot of really practical needs.

Josh: So it's a website where you can partner directly with that social worker with a tangible need that they have. Pretty incredible! Real time, and you're connected right in. You also mentioned to me earlier that there's a night that Christian Heritage has set up just for our church.

Megan: Yes. So June 10, this week, there's an informational night on Zoom where you can learn more about Christian Heritage and the work that they do, but also ways that you can step into that or just be praying for them. They also have another night on June 17. So either of those nights you can sign up to learn more.

Josh: So that's Christian Heritage. What's another partnership that we have locally?

Megan: Another one is *City Impact*. City Impact empowers under-resourced communities through holistic youth, family, and neighborhood development. It was actually founded by a couple who, over 20 years ago, attended Lincoln Berean's college group. But their vision today is to grow kids into leaders who break the cycle of poverty. They have a couple of different programs that they work with. They have their *City Impact Faith*, which is their Bible club on Tuesday nights and on Sundays. They also have a mentoring program, a reading program, and a leadership program. And one way they invited us as a church to partner with them this summer is by helping to stock their library shelves for their summer reading program. And so, on this card, there's a link that can take you to Amazon where you can purchase any of those books, and it would be amazing if we as a church, this weekend, could fulfill that entire wish list.

Josh: That's awesome! When I look, even across this room, I see so many of you that have partnered with City Impact in a variety of different ways, whether that's through Gifts of Love, or joining in, helping within the program. And this would be a really practical way that this church could make a huge dent this summer right now. So that's a great opportunity as well. What's another partnership that we have?

Megan: Another one is *Juniper Refuge*, and the mission at Juniper Refuge is to show Jesus to refugees and immigrants by serving holistically through friendship. And recently, Nicky, the director at Juniper Refuge, told me a story about one of the women that they're serving, and knowing the background of the families that they serve, getting to talk about Jesus freely is a little bit difficult, which makes the story even sweeter. But no one had told this woman the gospel; no one had talked to her about sin or Jesus' sacrifice. But she said that she simply saw how Christians who loved Jesus showed up for her. And so she expressed that she now wants to be a part of that Christian community. So now that that relationship has been built, the doorway is open, where they could talk about Jesus,

Josh: Which is our whole heart—that we could meet physical tangible needs in a way to give the greatest opportunity for the greatest need that we have. Awesome!

Megan: Yeah. And so they actually started a sponsorship program. They learned over the pandemic that so many of the nonprofits that work with immigrants and refugees became inundated with requests that they couldn't meet. So they created this sponsorship program, which is a team of people. And the key word there is *team*.

Josh: So, it's not me by myself. . .

Megan: No, you don't have to know everything. It's not alone. With just a team of people that can practically serve these families. And so one of the examples might be helping them sort through their mail, knowing what's junk mail and what's not.

Josh: Who in this room could not use help with that, right? (*laughter*) Let alone if you're coming from a different culture.

Megan: Now another way is teaching driving concepts so they can get a driver's license here.

Josh: I've seen some of you in the parking lot. This isn't for everyone, right? Only if you're called.

Megan: Another way could be job preparation. So helping with interview questions, helping to write a resume. So really practical ways.

Josh: Awesome! So that's another partnership we have. What's another?

Megan: Another is the *People's City Mission*. So, it's a homeless shelter here in Lincoln. And their mission is to be a witness to Christ among the poor and homeless, to serve their needs, and advocate for their cause to the community at large. And so a big way we, as a church, can help them is through serving meals at the shelter, or through sorting donations at their Help Center. They serve lunch and dinner every single day. And even if a small portion of us this weekend, committed to serve once over the summertime, we could fill all of their volunteer spots. Another big need that they have, especially in the summer, is for bottled water. As you can imagine, with the hotter temperatures, they give out a lot of bottled water to those at the shelter, or also those who are on the street. And so even just donating a case or two of bottled water would be a huge blessing!

Josh: You see, these partnerships span a variety of different needs and people across our community. What's the last partnership we have time to talk about this morning?

Megan: So the last one is the *Pregnancy Center*. They show love and grace to every woman who walks in their door. They provide confidential counseling, pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, materials, parenting classes, and character-based relationship education at no cost to those that they serve. And a big way we can serve them this summer is through prayer, committing to praying every day for their staff that are there, committing to pray for the women who walk through their doors. But then also through donations. They have tangible needs for diapers and other baby items, but then also financial needs. And so you can reach out at their website to them to learn more about those immediate needs.

Josh: So, as Megan's talking for some of us in this room, we're thinking, *Boy, there's something that sparks my heart, and I either want to learn more about this, or I just want to take a step into one of these opportunities.* What's the simplest way to do that?

Megan: Well, for those five that I talked about, they either have an email address or a website that you can reach out to. But then also for all of our other partners, they're all listed on our website. And that's *Lincolnberean.org/local*, which is also on the cards. But you can learn more about all of our partners. It has a brief description of them and then a way that you can contact them. But also at the bottom of that website, we have a contact form, and we as an outreach team would love to meet with you if you have questions, or you want to know more about any of our partners. Or

even just a process through where God is calling you to serve, you can fill out that contact form and we'll get back in touch. But we also have a Facebook group. And so if you're on Facebook, you can search Lincoln Berean Outreach. I post regularly the different needs and opportunities that are in the community, but also globally, that you can step into.

Josh: So, our team here would love to talk with you. You can contact them, or you can contact any of our partners directly within that. Megan, there's others of us in this room right now that we're just kind of feeling a little uncomfortable. Maybe this is a stretch for us. We haven't done something like this before. What advice do you have for us?

Megan: I'd first say that it's normal. Definitely when I step into a new serving opportunity, there's a little bit of anxiety that can come up with that. But I'd encourage you to pray about it. You know, ask God where He's calling you to serve, but also in what capacity. We're all gifted so uniquely, with different passions, and the way we serve doesn't have to be the same way as the person sitting next to us or even our family. So really pursue God in that. But then also, I don't think there's ever been a time where I've left serving and wish that I wouldn't have. There's definitely been moments leading up to it, where I think I don't have time, or I just don't really want to go. But at the end of that, God always met me there and used that time to glorify Him. And it's been a huge blessing! But how about you, Josh? What advice would you have?

Josh: I think you nailed it, in that this is part of the way that God uses us to help the least of these around us. But in the process, He changes us, and something happens in our hearts. And I think just praying and asking for God to soften our hearts to the spots He wants to have us align and join Him in what He's doing—and then take a step to do that. And so for me, one of the ways that I kind of took a step in this way was I started working with a gentleman through *English as a Second Language*. English is my worst subject and always has been in school, but I could get him up to a kindergarten level. And so I thought that would be good. But what was so great through that is it opened the door for us to start talking about jobs with him. And it opened the door to talk through some of the car problems he had. It opened the door to meet his son, and then even inviting our family into some of the cultural times they had together with other refugees in the city. And we were incredibly blessed through the whole process.

And so, Church, what we have to realize through this is we are called to take care of the most vulnerable in our community. And that has to happen, not just through good intentions or through a good heart, but through carving out margin in our lives, to take action in that. And so as we look at this summer, our challenge for you would be to look at your calendar, maybe look at opportunities and specific ways that you could create margin to care for the most marginalized around our community. We want to sing about that in a prayer to God. But before we do that, would you join me in standing, and, Megan, could you close us out in prayer?

Megan: Yes, I will.

God, we thank You for who You are and this opportunity to get to worship You today, to learn more about You. And, Lord, as we've talked so much over this past year, I pray that

as we leave here today, we each, every day, take steps to become more like You. But through that process, to help others do the same. Lord, we ask for margin in our lives. We ask for softened hearts to see those who are around us and the needs and opportunities that You are calling us into. God, we pray specifically for these nonprofits across our community, and pray for their staff and their volunteers, that You would sustain them, that You would give them strength for the work that they're doing. But also we pray for those who are reaching out for help, God, that through them they can come to know You and feel Your love. Lord, we ask all of this in Your name, Amen.

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