



Change

Part 5 – You Don't Have to be Broke

Pastor Ted Cunningham

So, let me just ask this question before we start. How many of you would say you grew up poor? Just look around for just a second. I've been asking random people that question and it's interesting that there is a pause for a lot of people. They're thinking about it. "Did I grow up poor?" The pause had me thinking. Why are people not able to tell you right away? Some of you shot your hand quickly. "We were dirt poor" is what you just said when you raised your hand. Others of you raised your hand kind of slow. Here's what I found out. The pause is... As I asked people why they couldn't answer that question quickly, they would say, "If you looked at how we lived in the 40s, 50s, and 60s and compared to right now, you would definitely say we were poor. However, we didn't feel that when we were growing up." Isn't that something? That's the pause.

My mom was born in Springfield, Illinois. For the first ten years of her life, her family of five lived in a 400 square foot home. So, young people, you cannot claim the tiny house movement. You didn't come up with that. These are the senior adults in the room. Then Grandpa Earl came into some money because he moved them from Springfield to Naperville, Illinois and they upgraded to an 800 square foot home, so they were living on easy street; let's just talk about that. My grandma lived there for over 60 years.

What have you been taught about the poor? We have all socioeconomic families represented across the board today here at Woodland Hills. But, what have you been taught about the poor? Some of you have this fundamental belief about the poor and it's part of your bias whenever we talk about this subject.

You would say, "The poor are lazy." Let me ask this question. How many of you who just raised your hand would say, "We grew up poor, but my parents are the hardest working people I've ever known"? Look around at that. "Mom and Dad worked very hard." "They worked the farm very hard." "My dad worked his two jobs very hard and we had enough to get by." Because someone finds themselves in poverty, it doesn't mean that they're lazy,

How about this one. "The poor just want to abuse the system." "They just want to keep having children so they can keep getting checks or they can get bigger checks." Some of you, before you're generous in helping those who find themselves in need, you have this fundamental belief: "I won't help them until they help themselves."

Today, if you have your Bibles, turn to Luke 6. We're going to start in Verse 20. Jesus is going to give us a very different picture of how we should be viewing those who are in poverty. It's the place to start with your core beliefs on this subject. If you're new to our church and you have been following along the last few weeks or few months, another sacred echo for us is this idea of Christians being unsettled in their beliefs and this idea that we can wrestle with that, yes, but we can live with doubt also. We're here to tell you we're glad you're here if your wrestling with doubt. This is a safe place to do that.

However, we want you to settle on what you know is true. Today, some of the beliefs that we have, some of the core beliefs, if you're brand new to the faith, that you can take deep into your soul is this: We don't love money, we don't put our hope in money, we don't trust money, and we don't serve money. We'll see this in just a second, but Jesus is going to talk about those who are in poverty but are in the kingdom and those who are rich and are not in the kingdom. And he's going to say it's better to be poor and in the kingdom of God than to be rich and not.

Here's where it begins. **20 Looking at his disciples...** There was a group of people following Jesus at this time. If you're following along in the scripture, you'll see early on that they left everything to follow Jesus. If you remember in the gospels when Jesus calls his first disciples, it says they followed him, but what does it say before they followed him? They immediately left their nets. They immediately dropped their nets, which means they walked away from their primary source of income to follow Jesus.

Now he's talking to those and **he said: "Blessed..."** Or we could use the word *happy*. That should be your state of mind. You should be happy. **"...are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."** Jesus is not saying that all poor people will be in the kingdom of God. He's saying, "You have chosen to follow me, you have found yourself now in poverty, but blessed are you because you are in the kingdom of heaven. And he's going to give four blessings and four woes. He's going to say, "You're poor, you're hungry, people hate you, you're weeping, but rejoice because the kingdom of heaven is yours."

21 "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." I love this; you know this is a big subject of mine. I love talking about laughter. Martin Luther said, "Heaven is the birthplace of laughter." If they don't allow laughter in heaven, he actually is strong to say, "I don't want to go."

I love what Mickey Pitman says around this church. He says, "People complain about Woodland Hills, saying there are too many people and too much laughter." He said, "If you don't like too many people and too much laughter, you're not going to like heaven." I love that. Mickey said that, not me. I always like to give attribution to people that make those strong statements. I don't like to claim them as my own.

22 "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you..." Have you ever noticed this? We tend to cross the street to get away from people that Jesus would have hung out with. We don't want to be involved with them. **"...and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man."**

Look at what he says. **23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy..."** Who taught us around here for the first ten years of this church how to rejoice and leap when hard times come upon you? Gary Smalley.

He would travel to events and he would bring two cheerleading pom poms. He would say, "If you're going through a difficult time, remember to pick those up and go, "Yaaaaay!" He said that's what you should be doing to rejoice when trials of all different types fall upon you. Jesus is saying you can rejoice in what you're going through right now **"...because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets."**

Now he going to parallel that and, in contrast, talk about these woes. **24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort."** He's not saying rich people are not part of the kingdom. Again, the main teaching here is it's better to be poor and in the kingdom, than to be rich and not. **25 "Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now..."** and party now and enjoy the house of feasting now, **"... for you will mourn and weep."** If you are not part of the kingdom, you will one day spend eternity... You will find yourself where there is the gnashing of teeth for all of eternity.

26 "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you..." When you have a good reputation and you're known in town as someone who can make good money and someone who is maybe even philanthropic, and you're pictures in the paper giving big checks to organizations... If you are able to do all of that, but you're not in the kingdom, woe to you. And then he says the opposite of what he said at the end of the blessings. **"...for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."**

Today, as we look at this, the struggle, whenever we talk about poverty, is how do you minister to those in poverty, how do you get out of poverty, and how to you stay out of poverty. To begin this conversation, we have to start where Jesus starts. He says blessing should be on those who are poor, but are in the kingdom, and woe to those who are rich and have much and are not.

The Apostle Paul gives this to Timothy very clearly in 1 Timothy 6. He says, **6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.**

This is important in our conversation. Don't look at rich people as though they did something wrong and they should be punished and they're greedy Republicans. Don't look at poor people as though they are lazy and wicked Democrats. We have to change the way we approach this conversation if we are going to be of any earthly good in ministering to those who are in poverty in our community. Paul is telling Timothy to warn people that **Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

He goes on to say, **17 Command those... Your translation may say Instruct those. who are rich in this present world... Again, there is no problem with having great wealth. ...not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth... We don't love money, we don't put our hope in it, and we don't serve it. ...which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In**

this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Situational Poverty vs Generational Poverty. So, how do we minister knowing that the majority of those sitting in here right now have plenty of money to go out to eat later on today or we have plenty of money to grab something on the way home. We have plenty of money to get groceries. Some may find themselves surviving and in struggling mode. We're going to talk about that in just a moment, but when we talk about poverty, there are really two types of poverty we've been discussing in this community for the last year and a half when we discuss how to help people.

The one I feel our church is able to really do something about – and we're doing it this morning with Mercy Offering – is **situational poverty**. Situation poverty is that person who has lost a job or there's a health crisis that hits their family. I've talked to many people who moved here from Kansas and Iowa to get rich. And then you got here, and you realized this isn't the place to get rich fast like you thought it would be. And you moved and now you find yourself in a situation where the bank account is empty, the money is gone.

Maybe if you grew up in church, your church had a benevolence fund. Here, we call it the mercy offering. When you leave here today, there will be boxes in the back that have a little white card on the top that says Mercy Offering. That's to meet the physical needs of those in our church who are finding themselves in a situation.

It's not really an offering... We could help those in generational poverty. Generational poverty would be defined as two generations in a family that live with the scarcity mindset. They don't have enough, and they need others to help them. We don't find that the mercy offering at our church is really a great resource for brining people out of generational poverty, but it is helpful to those who need help for the next couple of months to get back on their feet, to get another job.

What I so love about this is many of you have needed help from the mercy offering. The mercy offering has never run out of money. That's the thing I love about it. Your generosity to meet the physical needs... I feel you have taken Paul's instruction to Timothy well. You are willing to share. Some of you even write big checks for the mercy offering because you want to meet the needs of those in our church family that are finding themselves in situations that need help.

There are others that grow concerned. "You can't really mention it a lot from the front because people are going to come out of the woodwork." We're in our seventeenth year as a church and this has never been a problem. We help people pay rent. We help people pay mortgage and cars and we give people gas money and we have food. If you are in a position where you need help and you find yourself in a situation where you need help from your church family, we should be known for that. This should be something that marks us as a church, not something we kind of keep quiet and if people come up, we'll do it.

For those of you who God has richly blessed, you are commanded to not be arrogant in that, not to trust that, and to be willing to share.

It's Acts 4... This was the first church. They gathered together. They brought their resources together for the purpose of sharing with one another. No one claimed everything they had was their own. That's what we should be doing. That account has never gone down to zero. If you need to help, we do this on Sundays, you can stop by and say you need help. You can fill out a form. The only reason for filling out that form is that we know there are people that there are other things that can take place in their life to help them pay the bills. We just want to make this part of your discipleship, not just meeting an immediate need.

It's the generational poverty and the homeless problem in our community that we still keep asking the Lord to give us wisdom on how to best do this in the community.

Seven ways out of poverty. Today, as we talk about ministering to those in situational poverty and in generational poverty, we want to look at seven ways out of poverty. How can you get out of poverty and how can you stay out of poverty? The first one is very simple and these all come to us from the scripture.

Get out of bed. Proverbs tells us this. This is important. I told a friend this week, "I know you don't have a job. Get up tomorrow early, take a shower, and you will be amazed what that will do for you mentally and emotionally and relationally and even spiritually. Just get up and take a shower, ready to go." No one is going to call you. "Well, I put some feelers out last week; I'm going to wait for the phone calls." Huh uh. While you're waiting for the phone calls, hit the street. In Proverbs 6, the scripture says, ***9 How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? 10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—11 and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.***

How many of you have ever worked a double shift? All around. I had a couple marines on the front row this morning and they were like, "A double shift..." How many of you come home after working 15, 16 hours and you just fall over? Isn't that a great feeling? I think it's a great feeling. And the scripture speaks to this. Solomon shares this in Ecclesiastes. He says, "The sleep of a laborer is sweet." Why? It's because you've worked hard. You've earned that rest. How many of you have a hard time sleeping the 3rd, 4th, 5th day of vacation? You end up staring at the ceiling.

Some of you have retired and you've moved to Branson, and you realize retirement is boring after three months. I've talked to many people. Jack Herschend says, "Yeah and we have a program for that; it's called Silver Dollar City." It's a great senior go back to work program. I always love going there because you can even see it in the senior adults. They're like, "I don't need this job. I'm just here killing time." But you can fall down in bed and rest. That's exactly what the scripture is saying.

Some of you... We say it around here a lot. You're waiting for the perfect job. It is time for you to take any job until the perfect job comes along. It may happen – and it may not – that any job could become your perfect job.

So, there's something that's out there. It's a little bit debated right now, but the research is growing in it. It's called the **Success Sequence**. If you get time, Google this; it's a fascinating thing. My friend Matt Engle at Glue in Boulder, Colorado, is helping us in this community. The success sequence I think has a lot of implications for what's going on in Branson. It was coined by the Brookings Institution and you can look all this up. You'll also get all the debate around it. But if you will get a high school degree, a full-time job, and get married before you have children, you have a 92% shot of staying out of poverty. Those who follow this sequence right here... And by the way in this order. Let me just give you that order right there. High school degree, full-time job, marriage before children. If you'll do that order, it's almost guaranteed you'll stay out of poverty is what the success sequence is talking about.

Work hard. So, you've got to get up. You've got to start. We talk about this lot. I'm going to hit this point quickly before moving to the third way out. Just work hard. Proverbs 13:4 says, ***The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.*** Get up tomorrow and get the job. When you get that job, work at it and work at it hard, but here's the key:

Work steady over time. Proverbs 13:11 says, ***Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears...*** This is why Amy and I don't go to a lot of dinners at this church anymore because we're kind of tired of the pitches at the end of dinner. You know what I'm talking about. "You want to make a little more money, Ted?" "No, I do not. Do not bring your folder out. I don't want to see a white board." I'm hitting Amy under the table, *let's get out of here*. We have a great meal and then you put a folder in front of us. If it's a get-rich-quick scheme that disappears quickly, I don't want it. Sorry, I was just throwing that in. I thought that was gentle. Was that gentle? Amy will tell me later if that was gentle. ***...wealth from hard work grows over time.***

Here's the way to look at it. This is for the younger people. I had a lot of seniors in the first service. It's like a 90% senior adult service at 8:30. They told me, "Yeah that's interesting because we're at the end of that." Some of you are at the beginning of this. John Acuff kind of breaks this down in ten-year increments in your life when it comes to working steady over time.

In your 20s, it's really a learning period in your life. You should be getting an education for many, and I would encourage many of you to pursue vocational training. Go the community college if you're not going to get a college degree. You've been reading this and seeing this in the news. The trades are craving tradesmen right now. You can get an apprenticeship, on the job training, vocational training. For some, that means you're going to go to college and you're going to get multiple degrees to work in the field that you want to work in, but in the 20s, you spend your time learning.

In your 30s, you're editing. You're deciding what you should do and what you shouldn't do. Your saying no easily to stuff in your 30s because, "I'm not trained in that area," or "I don't have an education in that area, so I'm going to pursue what I need to be doing and what I don't need to be doing." When you settle then on what you should be doing...

In your 40s, you begin mastering. In your 40, you're getting better. I'm 44 years old, so I have like six more years in the 40s. This is why some people in their 40s or 50s, when everything crashes, have a hard time starting over. But, I'm here to tell you in your 40s and 50s, you can start over. You can follow

this; it's just a little bit shorter of a time frame in which to do it. But you really settle. For some that are in your 30s and 40s, you still haven't figure out what you should be doing. It's time to really be thinking through what you can do and work steady at it over the long haul.

My father-in-law was in the first service. His family is watching from Minnesota this morning. I just think he is a great example of this. He worked at Hormel Foods for 32 years. His dad worked there 42 years. His grandfather worked there 47 years. So, you have them to thank for spam. If you enjoy Spam, years have gone into that. But, they worked a job, worked steady at it.

In your 50s, after you've learned and edited and mastered, the 50s is really the time you begin to harvest. You begin to say, "I see now the fruit of my labor. I'm peaking in my 40s and 50s and harvesting."

In your 60s, you're guiding. For me, I'm going to put the word *fish* right there in front of guiding. I will be fish guiding. This is when you realize you're coming to the end. You're in what's called the sunset years of your career. By no means, 60s and 70s, do you hear me saying you are done. You're not. Do you know what you need to be doing? You need to be guiding. You need to be investing in the next generation.

This is what Paul did with Timothy. He was teaching him and instructing him and guiding him – discipleship, one on one. Find a young man or a young woman in this church who is just getting started. If they are in your field or close to your field, even better. Encourage them, challenge them, don't waste these years. You're better than a college degree. To sit down with someone who can mentor you, to sit down with someone who can disciple you and who can teach you and guide you through all of this is invaluable. You want that.

Avoid drunkenness and Gluttony. This is a roadblock for many. This is a stumbling block for many. The scripture says in Proverbs 23, ***19 Listen, my son, and be wise, and set your heart on the right path:*** Watch what it says about how this leads to poverty. ***20 Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, 21 for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.***

For some of you, your situational poverty is because you got a divorce. And you know one divorce, two divorces is just the dividing of the income and dividing of the assets and it can be very challenging. Don't begin coping through those situations with drugs, alcohol, or food.

I think I should go on the record in light of the confirmation hearings this week. I don't like beer. Alright? I've never liked beer. I just wanted to get that out there. It's too soon? I could tell in the first service, it's too soon. I made a note, "No Kavanaugh jokes in the service."

Sunday night, Amy and I went to Top of the Rock and there was a guy there. It was Sunday night; we had about an hour. We dropped one kid off and another kid off and then we had to go back and pick them up, so we had an hour. We went into the Buffalo Bar to get an appetizer and a there was a guy who had been there for a few hours. I was trying to keep what I do for a living from him.

I always try to keep that from people because they always get super spiritual on me when I tell them what I do, and their foul mouths clean up immediately as soon as they hear. Except one guy... I wish I could quote what he said to me, but I can't. I told him I was a pastor and he went, "No @#\$%" Those are my favorites to minister to, but this guy was classic.

He goes, "So, what do you do." I mean he was out.

I always like to start with, "I'm a teacher."

"Oh, what do you teach?"

"History and ethics."

"Where do you teach this at?"

"A theme park."

If they keep asking I've got to come clean. "I'm a pastor."

The guy goes, "Good for you!" I'm not making this up. This is how the whole conversation goes. He goes, "I know the Lord... and he knows me. I go to a lot of churches and they don't know the gospel."

I go, "What do you mean?"

He goes, "I go, and they say do this don't do this do this don't do this."

I said, "What do you mean?"

He goes, "And I gotta tell them he already did it all."

Some of you are like, *He's a convincing drunk*. The only reason I'm good at it is because of the Andy Griffith Show.

He goes, "They're telling me to do this and don't do this..."

I said, "It's very true what you're saying. The dos and the don'ts don't bring you salvation. That isn't the gospel. The gospel is you've been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, but the dos and the don'ts that we have in scripture – you'd call the precepts... The precepts in the scripture are the overflow of our salvation, not what we do to earn it."

Amy always laughs at my attempt to witness to people who will forget this conversation in the morning.

But he was going on and on about it, "Does your church have a lot of rules?"

I said, "Well, not like manmade rules, but we follow the scripture. For example where it says don't be drunk on wine, that's one of the things that we follow. It's right there; I'm not making it up. It's in black and white. But you don't stay out of drunkenness to get saved, you clean up your life as an overflow of what Jesus has given you. You are righteous because of him."

For some of you, life has hit you. For some of you, the situational poverty you're in or maybe the generational poverty you're trying to come out of is because your whole family is marked by addiction: drugs, alcohol, food. And you find yourself coping and just numbing out.

For some, you'll get started in life and you'll be learning and editing to the point you get to mastering and you'll sabotage your life by drinking too much wine and eating too much.

Avoid too much debt. In Proverbs 22, scripture goes on to say, ***2 The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.*** Money is what the Lord blesses... We are blessed with material blessings, not so that we don't grow arrogant with it, but so that we use it to bless other people. That's the goal. That's the outcome of this. We're a conduit that the Lord can flow blessings through us to other people. It starts here in the church and it goes out into the community.

Submit to authority. We talk about this a lot around here. You want to be a great employee? You want to be a great owner of a business or an entrepreneur? You have to be someone who understands authority. In Proverbs 13, the scripture says, ***18 Whoever disregards discipline comes to poverty and shame...*** I tell young people around here all the time. I tell young ladies especially. As you're checking out a guy that you may marry, you need to spend a lot of time around that guy and his parents. You need to see how he treats his parents. You need to see how he honors his parents because respect for authority begins at home. If he respects and honors his mom and dad, even when he doesn't agree with them, this is someone who is going to be able to keep a job later in life. This is very important because this feeds into how we earn and make money. ...***but whoever heeds correction is honored.***

Be honest. Proverbs 13 says, ***11 Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow.*** Work hard, work steady over time, get out of bed, get that job, get any job until the perfect job comes along. Today, knowing many of you have been blessed and there are some of you trying to figure out what to do and how to help. You get an opportunity today to help those in need. I want to encourage you as we close and as we pray together. As you walk out these doors, be generous as you place money in the mercy offering. If you need help and you find yourself in need and maybe it's short term, I encourage you to stop by the Welcome Booth back there and share if you could use the help. That's what the church is for. That's what we're here for.

I just want to say this for many of you in here that we have helped. I am so grateful for the attitude and the response people have towards the mercy offering. There are many who have been helped through a difficult time and when they found themselves getting a new job and being able to save an emergency fund and get back on their feet, one of the very first things they think of in that process is giving back to the church. We've had people receive mercy offerings from our church who have brought every penny back to the church. This is how it's supposed to work. If God has blessed you with much, don't allow your bias in politics to continue to look down with attitude on those in poverty. I would ask that the

Holy Spirit calls you by name with what Jesus taught us today in Luke 6, that you would understand. For those of you who live in poverty, I would ask that you wouldn't look to rich people, just because they have so much money that they grew over time, as though they are just greedy republicans. I pray that the Holy Spirit would call you by name in this as we are a church family called to gather and not claim anything of our own, but to bring it together so that we can minister to those in need. So, on your way out today, I emphatically implore you to be generous in that offering.

Would you stand and let's pray together? Father, it is in the name of Jesus Christ that we come to you as a church still feeling like we have so much to learn about those caught up in generational poverty. Would you give us wisdom and discernment for how to minister to them best, how to help and how to encourage.

May we never be a people that crosses a street to avoid people that you would be spending your time with. May that not ever be in our hearts. I pray for the generosity of so many around here. We have so much when it comes to material blessings that we would not grow arrogant in that and that you would convict us of that arrogance. I pray that you would lead us to hearts of giving and hearts that overflow into sharing with others.

For those in need in our church, whether it be through situational or generational poverty, I pray that today they would listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and form new beliefs deep in their heart because we know the heart is the wellspring of life and everything we say and do flows out of the heart. I pray that today they would understand we don't love money, we don't trust money, we don't put our hope in money, we don't serve money; we're here to serve ultimately you.

I pray that they would get out of bed tomorrow and have a new attitude and a new outlook as they approach work, as they approach staying at a job over a long period of time to let that grow and to be able to provide for themselves and for their families and ultimately for others around them.

We are grateful for this and we pray for the generosity in the mercy offering as we leave here today. It is in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.