

“You May Not Ignore It”
Deuteronomy 22:1-4
November 30, 2025
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
Pastor Nicoletti

The Reading of the Word

We return this morning to the Book of Deuteronomy. We will have two more sermons (including this one) from Deuteronomy this month, then we’ll turn to the theme of Christmas, and in January we’ll shift back to our series in the Gospel of Mark and then return to Deuteronomy next September.

But this morning, we return to Moses’s instruction for Israel about how they are to live as God’s people in the land, as we turn to Deuteronomy 22:1-4.

As we do, please do listen carefully, for this is God’s Word for us this morning.

Moses said to the people:

^{22:1} “You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother. ² And if he does not live near you and you do not know who he is, you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it. Then you shall restore it to him. ³ And you shall do the same with his donkey or with his garment, or with any lost thing of your brother's, which he loses and you find; you may not ignore it. ⁴ You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again.”

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Prayer of Illumination

Lord, you have dealt well with us,
just as you have promised in your Word.
Teach us now good judgment and knowledge,
for we believe in your Word to us – your commandments and your testimonies.
You are good and you do good,
so teach us your ways.
We know that your Word to us in the Scriptures is of more value than gold.
Help us now to attend to it as such.
Grant this, we ask, for Jesus’s sake. Amen.
[Based on Psalm 119:65, 66, 68, 72]

Introduction

We've gone through some difficult texts in Deuteronomy. This morning's is a little more straightforward.

A range of situations are described where a brother – a neighbor and fellow Israelite – is in need. And when that happened, Moses tells the people that they are not to ignore it, but are instead to help.

Now, on a surface level, few would dispute that kind of ethical exhortation. And yet ... it's interesting that God, through Moses, repeats himself in this text, and makes his point in several different ways ... as if he knows we might resist hearing him.

Because this is one of those laws that we all tend to agree with ... but which we often fail to actually live out. We're prone to ignore it when it actually comes up in our own lives. Which is maybe why God is so clear here, when he specifies in verse 3 that we may not ignore such things.

Few of us have neighbors with sheep or oxen. But the heart of this law still applies to us in many significant ways. And it's worth taking time this morning to consider what that looks like.

As we reflect on this text, what we see is that: Though we are tempted to ignore our neighbor's needs, we are called to sacrificially care for them, as the Lord has cared for us.

Let me say that again: Though we are tempted to ignore our neighbor's needs, we are called to sacrificially care for them, as the Lord has cared for us.

Let's dig into that a bit more.

Though We are Tempted to Ignore Our Neighbor's Needs, We Are Called to Sacrificially Care For Them

So, as we've said, though we are tempted to ignore our neighbor's needs, we are called to sacrificially care for them.

But what does that really mean?

Well, let's look at our text. In verse 1, the situation given is that an Israelite sees his neighbor's ox or sheep going astray. Now, it goes without saying that the eighth commandment applies: He cannot steal the ox or the sheep.

But he's also not just called on to refrain from stealing. Rather, he's called on to actively seek to help.

Moses explains that when they see such a situation of need, they may not ignore it.

And he says it three times. First, in verse one, Moses says that if you see your neighbor's straying livestock, you may not ignore it. Then, verse three extends that command not only to other animals

and to garments, but to “any lost thing of your brother’s, which he loses and you find.” “You may not ignore it,” Moses says again. Then verse four extends it beyond lost items to other situations of need. If your brother is traveling with an animal, and the animal has fallen, and they need help, Moses says again that you “shall not ... ignore them.”

Three times Moses warns against ignoring the needs of those around us.

Which reminds us how well Moses knew human nature. Because the truth – though we rarely talk about it – is that we often ignore the needs of other people.

Many of us are quite good at pretending we didn’t hear the request for help ... pretending we didn’t see the situation where someone could use a hand ... pretending we didn’t notice the email alerting us to a need ... pretending we don’t know about a particular person’s struggle.

In a range of ways, though we don’t like to admit it even to ourselves ... you and I are pretty good at ignoring the needs of other people.

Several commentators point out that the phrase translated here as “You shall not ignore” could be translated more literally: “You must not hide yourself.” [Alter, 285; Brown, 213; Craige, 287; Wright, 240]

We hide ourselves from the needs of others.

We may try to justify it – to tell ourselves that someone else will deal with the problem, someone else will help. But our text here tells us that God has called us to help. He’s put us in the place to see the need. And he doesn’t want us to ignore it. We might hide ourselves from the need of another person, so that others don’t know that we’ve seen it ... but God knows that we’ve seen it.

What does that tend to look like for you? How do you hide yourself from the needs of others?

Central to Moses’s command here is a prohibition of this human tendency. When you see people in need, Moses commands: You shall not ignore it.

Instead, Moses calls God’s people to intervene – to help. And that meant sacrifice.

The Israelite addressed in these verses probably had their own plans for the day, their own work, their own needs, their own tasks. [Brown, 213] That’s probably why they were out and about in the first place.

But even so, they were called on to act – to change their plans. Verse one called them to bring the animal back to the owner, if they knew whose it was. Verse two called them to bring the animal home and care for it if they didn’t know whose it was. Verse four called them to pause their own work, to help their neighbor with his animal who was struggling.

Each is a call for sacrifice.

And it could mean not only time and effort, but money. After all, in the situation in verse two, the Israelite is to take the beast, and keep it safe, shelter it, and feed it, until the owner appears. [Alter, 985; Block, 512 n.5] And they were to do that even when they didn’t know who the owner was.

This law is not just a call to refrain from evil. It's a call to actively do good, even when it's costly. [Craig, 287]

It reminds me of a point that Pastor Rayburn has made many times: When we think of our sins, we tend to focus on the times when we've done something we shouldn't have done – what's traditionally referred to as our sins of commission. But it seems that if we were to actually see all our sins accurately, we'd be deeply struck by our sins of omission – all the things we should have done, but that we didn't do.

Our passage here is about sins of omission: things we should do, things we are called to do ... but that we often try to ignore, when it comes to the needs of others.

The Bible doesn't just call us to avoid harming our neighbor. It calls us to actively love our neighbor – even to love our neighbor as ourselves.

That's a heavy burden. And often, in response, we want to ask is: "Ok ... but who is my neighbor?"

Jesus was once asked this question, and he responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan ... a parable in which a man is attacked and left for dead in the road. A Priest and a Levite both pass by without helping. They ignore him. They hide themselves from his need. [Wright, 240] But then a Samaritan sees, and he acts – he helps. He serves the man sacrificially to restore him. And this was all the more striking because the Jews and Samaritans were enemies in that culture. Jesus's point was that even so, despite the animosity between them, despite the fact that they lived apart from one another, the Jew and the Samaritan were neighbors. And the commands concerning loving our neighbor as ourselves applied even between them. [Luke 10:25-37]

And that principle itself is found in the Old Testament as well.

In our very text we see that this obligation to help is not limited to our friends, or those closest to us. It extends in verse four to those who are far from us, and even to those not known to us at all.

But then, a very similar law found in Exodus goes even farther, by applying the very same commandments we find here, not just to our brother, but, Moses says, also to our "enemy" and even to "one who hates you." [Exodus 23:4-5] [Alter, 958]

This law – this calling – to help in times of need, applies not just to our friends, and those who love us ... but also to our enemies, and even those who hate us.

And it's not limited to our neighbor's stuff, but it also includes our neighbor themselves.

After all, if God wants us to care even for animals and garments that belong to other people, how much more must he want us to care for the other people themselves?

And, as one theologian notes, it's not just animals that wander, but people can wander. And if we should seek out wandering or fallen animals, how much more should we seek out wandering or fallen people ... whether those personal falls are financial ... or moral ... or spiritual? In any case, we are called on to restore them, to care for them, and not to ignore them. [Leithart, *Theopolis*, 55:00-56:02]

So when we see a need – when we become aware of a need – we are called on to act, not to ignore it.

Now, what exactly is required of us may vary depending on the details. Note the difference in verses one and two, depending on how close the owner was to the Israelite who found the animal. What we are called to do may vary. But in both these cases, at least, the Israelite was still called on to do something. Details may vary, and we may not owe the same kind of action to someone distant from us as we owe to someone close to us. But still, the call remains to take some kind of action – still the call remains to not ignore the need.

Though we are tempted to ignore our neighbor's needs, we are called to sacrificially care for them.

As we said, verse 2 reminds us that this principle has implications for how we relate to the needs even of those who are far from us – who are even unknown to us.

We'll spend some time thinking about how this applies close to home, in our daily lives. But it might also be good to stop and just reflect on the kind of big, global needs this may apply to as well ... the kind of big problems we could, as a society, decide to solve in the world ... but which we choose to ignore instead.

This past week I've been reading John Green's recent book, titled *Everything Is Tuberculosis*.

Tuberculosis, it turns out, currently causes more human deaths each year than any other infectious disease. In 2023 over a million people died of tuberculosis. That's more than died that year of malaria, typhoid, and war, combined. But tuberculosis has been largely curable since the 1950s. We know how to cure it in most cases. But we don't, at least not for some people. And so, about 150 million people have died of tuberculosis since we discovered its cure. [Green, Introduction]

The reason for that is because most of the people tuberculosis is killing exist in poor parts of the world ... parts of the world that those with more wealth and power don't really care that much about. And so the human lives there are not very important to them ... or to us. [Green, Chapter 1]

And so, over a million people each year die preventable deaths from an infectious disease that we cured 70 years ago.

In 2023 the UN outlined a plan that could end the dominance of TB by 2030 – reducing TB deaths by 90%. [<https://www.who.int/teams/global-programme-on-tuberculosis-and-lung-health/the-end-tb-strategy>; <https://www.stoptb.org/what-we-do/advocate-endtb/global-plan-end-tb/global-plan-end-tb-2023-2030>; <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/the-end-tb-strategy-information-sheet>] The cost for an 8-year period, when the most action was needed, would be about \$32 billion a year. It's estimated that doing that would save over 27 million lives between 2023 and 2050. That's almost a million lives a year, every year, for a 28 year period. [<https://www.stoptb.org/what-we-do/advocate-endtb/global-plan-end-tb/global-plan-end-tb-2023-2030>; https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-benefit-cost-analysis/article/one-million-lives-saved-per-year-a-costbenefit-analysis-of-the-global-plan-to-end-tuberculosis-20232030-and-beyond/A74F0D10F1017092A250EB604ED39B1B?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=bookmark; <https://globalhealthnow.org/2022-11/ending-tb-will-cost-billions-not-ending-it-will-cost-trillions>; Green, Chapter 23]

Now ... \$32 billion a year for 8 years is a lot of money. Don't get me wrong. I don't have it. But let's give a little bit of perspective.

That cost of \$32 billion dollars per year is less than one half of one percent of the U.S. federal budget. For less than one half of one percent of the U.S. federal budget, the U.S. government, all by itself, could save a million lives a year – that's preventing the equivalent of about four and a half Holocausts between now and 2050. And we don't even have to send troops anywhere to do it. Just half a percentage of our federal budget.

Instead, this past year, the U.S. government cut its funding for TB treatment overseas, which is predicted to lead to a significant increase in preventable tuberculosis deaths, rather than a decrease. [<https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/u-s-funding-cuts-could-result-in-nearly-9-million-child-tuberculosis-cases-1-5-million-child-deaths/>; <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12422474/>]

Now, I realize there are differences of opinion on what role the government should have in efforts like this. Some might be philosophically opposed to the U.S. government using half a percentage of its budget to save a million non-American lives a year. So, if you have concerns in that area, then let's consider this in terms of voluntary donations.

If we, collectively, as a country, decided that over the next eight years, we were going to take the money that we, as a nation, spend on candy and ice cream – just on candy and ice cream ... and we're going to cut it in half ... we'll still all get candy and ice cream (I'm not crazy), but for eight years it'll be half as much ... then with just the other half that we would have spent on candy and ice cream, we could fully fund that initiative to end the dominance of tuberculosis. We could probably save about 27 million lives in the years ahead. That's another way we could do that as a country. [<https://candyusa.com/news/confectionery-sales-break-records-surpass-54-billion-in-2024>; <https://www.renub.com/united-states-ice-cream-market-p.php>]

But I doubt we will. Instead, I suspect we're likely to give in to the temptation to ignore those in need ... to hide ourselves from the situation.

But God calls us to be people who act when we see a need.

And tuberculosis is just one issue on which we might act – one cause of preventable human death and suffering out in the world. There's malaria, and HIV, and maternal mortality, and malnutrition, and so much more. Now, few of us know a lot about all of those issues ... but most of us know something about at least one of them. What preventable cause of human death and suffering out in the world are you aware of? And are you doing anything about it? Of course, individually, our impact is small. But if God's people each had their need that they saw out in the world – the need they were committed to – the need they decided they weren't going to ignore – and each gave sacrificially to help with that cause ... then cumulatively, the Church could be a force in these needs among our global neighbors ... and a witness to the compassion of the God we serve.

Doing that would mean some sacrifice. But maybe we can give up some of our candy and ice cream money to address these needs and save lives. Maybe we could even give more than that.

The concepts behind our text have real implications for big global needs.

But, of course, the focus of the text itself is much closer to home. So let's turn now to that.

Let's consider how we, in our day-to-day lives, respond to the needs that present themselves to us in the ordinary course of life: The needs we may not go looking for, but – as Jesus puts it in his parable of the Good Samaritan – the needs of others that we encounter “by chance.” [Luke 10:31]

Sometimes it's someone we know out in our community: A colleague at work who's struggling with a task. A parent of one of our kid's classmates we know is going through a tough time. A neighbor down the street who we can see is facing some difficulties. And the question comes: Will we reach out to them, will we ask how they're doing, will we ask if there's a way we can help ... or will we ignore their need ... will we hide ourselves from them ... will we assume that someone else will probably help instead?

Our text this morning calls us to be the kind of people who step out – as awkward as we might feel, as busy as we might feel, as unenthusiastic as we might feel – God calls us to be the kind of people who step out and acknowledge their need. To ask sincerely if there's something we can do. Or, if we know the need, simply to act, to do something that will lighten their burden. That's the kind of people we're called to be towards the people we know, out in the world.

But we're also called respond that way with those whom we don't personally know but whom we come across out in the world: The older person struggling with their shopping bags in the parking lot. The man with mobility issues struggling to reach an item on the shelf at the grocery store. The neighbor who has left their garage door open, and has probably forgotten. Again, rather than ignore the need, we are called to be the kind of people who step in to help.

And so, these verses apply to the kind of person we are to be towards those in our community.

But also, these verses apply to the kind of person we are to be towards those in our church.

There are a lot of needs in this church. And they're talked about. You don't have to try very hard to see or to learn about many of them.

But some of you ... if you're honest ... have developed a habit of ignoring them ... of glazing over when you see the church email about a situation where help is needed ... of zoning out for the work party announcement, or the call for volunteers for ESL, or nursery, or Sunday school, or some other ministry.

And this tendency may not be limited to such formal calls. Sometimes it's someone you just see in the narthex with an obvious need ... or someone who talks to you about a need that they have after church ... and you know you could help them ... but instead you just offer to pray for them, and you wish them a good day. Have you maybe developed a habit of ignoring the needs of others in the church ... of hiding yourself from the needs of your brothers and sisters?

If so, our text this morning is a call to repent.

Sometimes what other people need is concrete help in the midst of a hardships.

But other times what they need is spiritual help in the midst of their wandering.

Remember what we said before: If we are to seek sheep or oxen that have wandered, then shouldn't we also seek the fellow believer – the brother or sister in Christ – who appears to be wandering? If we are to help lift up the donkey that has fallen down by the way, then certainly we are also to help lift up our brother or sister in Christ who has fallen down morally or spiritually.

You see things. You pretend you don't ... but you see them. The person you've chatted with from time to time at church ... but now you haven't seen them here for a while. The man who seems to be drifting from the truth. The woman whose demeanor has changed, who seems weighed down and struggling. You see those things ... and maybe you're tempted to hide yourself from the needs.

But our calling here is to seek to help: To seek to restore the one who may be wandering, to lift up the one who may be downcast. Note that the instructions here are gentle and loving – this is not just a harsh rebuke, but a loving pursuit of a brother or sister in spiritual need.

Sure, sometimes it can be wise to reach out to a pastor or elder first to see if there is more to the situation that you don't know about, or to ask if it's wise for you to reach out to them. But there's a big difference between contacting a pastor or elder to tell them to go help someone who is struggling, versus contacting a pastor or elder to ask how you can best help someone who is struggling.

As God's people, we are called to pursue those who have wandered, and lift up those who have fallen, whether socially, financially, spiritually, or morally. That's what the Lord says we owe one another in the Church.

Though we are tempted to ignore our neighbor's needs, we are called to sacrificially care for them.

That's important. It's also hard. So where do we find the motivation to serve the needs of others sacrificially, when we feel the pull to hide ourselves, and attend to our own needs instead?

The answer lies in realizing that we are not just those who are called to give help to others. Much more foundationally, we are those who have already received sacrificial help.

As The Lord Has Cared For Us

Think about this for Israel.

When Israel heard this call to seek the sheep that was going astray, when Israel heard the call to help lift up the ox that had fallen down by the way ... well, in that very moment, Israel should have realized that they were not just being given a command ... they were also being given a picture of how the Lord – how Yahweh – had already treated them.

Because when they, when Israel, were crushed under the burdens of Egypt – when they were laid low under the oppression of their enemies ... Yahweh did not ignore their need. Yahweh did not hide himself from them. But he came, and he helped – he acted and he lifted them up, delivering them from Egypt, and giving them new life.

Then, when Israel wandered from God in the desert ... when they went astray from the Lord, over and over again ... still, God did not ignore them. He did not hide himself from them. But he pursued them, he laid hold of them, and he led them into a place of safety – to his very own house.

Israel had experienced the very kind of care from Yahweh that Yahweh was now calling them to show to one another. And so how could they not pursue their neighbor's sheep, when the Lord had so lovingly pursued them? How could they not lift up their neighbor's ox, when the Lord had so graciously lifted them up?

Israel had already received what Moses was now asking them to give to one another.

And the same is true for us.

And we should especially see that in this season of Advent. In this season, we remember that we serve a God who shows up when his people are in need.

When we had wandered, when we had gone astray, when we were laid low, when we were downcast, when we were crushed under the load of our sin ... when the Lord saw us in that state ... he did not ignore our need. He did not hide himself from us. But he turned towards us. He came to our assistance. He showed up.

He came to us in human form – in the person of Jesus Christ. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He pursued us to such an extent that he took on our human nature so that he could bear the burden of our sin. He came to be laid low, so that he could lift us up to heaven.

Jesus is the truest fulfillment of this passage – he is the one who saw us in our need, and came to our aid, caring for us, restoring us, and lifting us up. That's what we remember in Advent, because that's why he came. That is the beauty of the gospel. [Leithart, *Theopolis*, 1:00:00-1:05:00]

And so when we hear a text like this, and we see what we're called to ... it's not primarily about beating ourselves up ... it's not about piling on more guilt ... instead, it's first a reminder of what Jesus has already done for us ... and then it's a call to love others as he has loved us: to see their needs rather than ignoring them, because he saw us ... to serve them, rather than hiding ourselves from them, because he served us.

Brothers and sisters ... whether it's the needs of the sick and poor halfway around the world ... or the person in our community who needs a helping hand with something ... or it's a fellow congregant who needs your strength to help them with a task, or your shoulder to cry on in a time of grief ... whatever the details, we are called to sacrificially care for those in need. Because that's how the Lord has cared for us.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*. New York, NY: Norton, 2004.
 Block, Daniel I. *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
 Brown, Raymond. *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity: 1993.
 Green, John. *Everything is Tuberculosis*. New York, NY: Crash Course Books, 2025.
 Craigie, Peter C. *The Book of Deuteronomy*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976.
 Millar, J. Gary. *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy*. Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 1998.
 Theopolis Podcast. “Episode 691: A Rebellious Son (Deuteronomy 21:18-22:4)” December 13, 2023.
<https://soundcloud.com/user-812874628/episode-691-a-rebellious-son-deuteronomy-2118-224>
 Wright, Christopher. *Deuteronomy*. NIBC. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996.

Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church’s core value of “Reformed Catholicity”), and also (following the Apostle Paul’s example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a source, that citation should not be understood or construed as me necessarily agreeing with, endorsing, or recommending to others anything else from that author or source, except for what I explicitly say I agree with, endorse, or recommend. When engaging with different materials and thinkers, all Christians must exercise wisdom and discernment to determine what is helpful, appropriate, and edifying for each person, taking into account their current needs, wisdom, and spiritual maturity.

On Giving to Help Fight Tuberculosis:

While advising you on the specifics of how you choose to give to various charities and needs was not the main point of this sermon, and I would encourage you instead to find causes and needs around the world that you are personally aware of and passionate about, it occurs to me that after hearing my illustration/application regarding tuberculosis, some may wish to give towards that cause. I am not an expert in how to most effectively direct private giving towards this specific cause, and I haven’t researched the organizations below in great depth, but from some initial online research, I’ve listed below three possibilities you might consider if you want to give to this cause, though I encourage you to apply your own research and wisdom to any decisions regarding giving. (Note: I’ve excluded Partners in Health from this list because of their advocacy for abortion in their work.):

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria:

To give: https://act.unfoundation.org/FJvB3vUCJUepH_5KN75TTQ2

To learn about the fund: <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/about-the-global-fund/>

Please note that this is a secular organization (which may therefore promote or act on secular values), but because of its size it may have significant impact and reach. It focuses on tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS.

Samaritan’s Purse Infectious Disease Fund:

To give: <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/donation-items/fight-epidemic-diseases/>

This is a Protestant Christian organization (but not theologically Reformed). By giving to the Infectious Disease Fund specifically, donations can be marked for use in supporting communities battling illnesses like tuberculosis, malaria, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, COVID-19, Marburg, cholera, or diphtheria.

World Vision:

For information and giving: <https://www.wvi.org/health/tuberculosis>

This is a Christian organization. While money donated to World Vision cannot be designated specifically towards tuberculosis, tuberculosis care is listed as a part of the work they do in the communities they serve.