



Series: Defender of the Weak

Title: God of the Lonely

Pastor Chad E. Billington

October 21, 2018
Smythe Street Cathedral

Pre-Sermon

Dismiss Switch

- Middle School Students head to stairs where you can get a snack on your way to the youth lounge for your class.

The Past Three Weeks...

The last few weeks, we as a church have been looking at a series called, “Defender of the Weak.”

In last Sunday’s message, Pastor Verner spent some time looking at Psalm 41:1-3.

Blessed are those who consider the poor; the Lord will deliver them in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve them and keep them alive, and they will be blessed on the earth; He will not deliver them to the will of their enemies. The Lord will strengthen them on their sickbed; He will restore them to health. Psalm 41:1-3

Now the Hebrew word for “consider” (“Blessed are those who consider the poor”) is a very interesting choice of word.

It’s the word *Sahel* – it means to give careful attention to a subject (to ponder it, to understand it) and then act accordingly in a wise way.

“Blessed are those who consider the poor”

Those who ponder/understand their situation and find ways to resolve the circumstances that are causing the problem.

We do this because God cares about these things.

Psalm 68:5–6 (LEB)

A father to orphans and a judge for widows, is God in his holy habitation.

God settles the lonely in a home; he brings prisoners out into prosperity. But the rebellious abide in a barren land.

We give consideration to the vulnerable, the widow (widows and single parents), the orphan, those who are alone, those who are in captivity, because God himself has an eye towards them. And as followers of Jesus, we are called to follow God's lead.

Sometimes we are confronted with the need to Consider the Poor

Interruption this week with 'Fred'

- Homeless (again)
 - Not knowing what to do.
 - Knowing the disadvantages of being on the street (no address, no money, no money no address).
 - It is getting cold.
- Register for the shelter
 - Full. But possibility of a bed.
 - Tents along the fence.

What Can We Do? – It can feel overwhelming, too hard.

Why We Need to Consider

People Falling in the River Story

- We are standing downtown, and see someone floating down the river needing rescue before they drown. We rush out to help them.
- 15 minutes later we see another person floating down needing help.
- This goes on for days, we set up teams to watch at night, organize blankets, warm soup, boats to make rescues easier.

- As this continues for weeks, the systems get better, but it is an overwhelming need, volunteers are dedicated but tired. We wonder if it will ever end.
- **Eventually, we should send someone up river to figure out how people are falling into the water.**

What We Are Doing as a Church to Help the Problem Upstream

Over the past few weeks we have talked about some of the problems, some of the why, today we want to wrap up our series with some of the how.

It is not enough for us as a church to feel bad, or to just focus on ‘pulling people out of the water’ (although that has its place), we want to collaborate with others in our community to work towards solutions that deal with the problem ‘upstream’ if you will.

Housing First – We are Committed to working within this model

- You help someone get a place to live FIRST, and work to bring supports around people after they have a place to live.
 - A place to live is a BASIC NECESSITY. You can’t really help someone work on budgeting, employment, medical care, preparing food if they don’t have a secure place that they know they are safe and can sleep.
 - Once someone has a place to live, you can then come alongside them and support the changes and skills that can help them develop a secure future.
- The City and many agencies (including churches, charities and government) have been working together deliberately to be less disjointed and create partnerships that help them solve this together. **WE HAVE BEEN AT THE TABLE, AND HAVE BEEN ASKED TO BE A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE SOLUTION.**

Significant Investment of Time: SUN – Light

6 to 8 hours per week (for the team, no single individual)

Requirements:

- 3 days of training to be scheduled in January this year.
- Needed: 3 Teams of 6.
- Commitment of 1 year with a client.
- We are piloting this for the city of Fredericton. Our 3 teams will be the first to do something like this in the city, in the hopes that what we learn will pioneer something that can expand to other churches across our city. We are on the front tip of the icebreaker, cutting into this issue with community partners.

Program like this that has partnered churches with homeless individuals in conjunction with social service and volunteer agencies managed to reduce homelessness by 68% in 8 years in Lethbridge, Alberta.¹ Trainer is a Christian who is now a key influencer in helping reduce homelessness in Canada.

Single Occurrence or More Flexible Investment of Time

- Not everyone can make a commitment to invest as intensively as those who are in the SUN-LIGHT groups.
- There are other agencies in our city that have needs, some for work, some for relationships.
- **Youth in Transition** is looking for people to spend time with their youth. *Last year they had 35 youth who had an average stay of 89 days in their home. These kids have experience domestic violence, drug addiction, mental illness, abuse, poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing. These kids are hurting.*
 - They're looking for a few to come and do a Christmas baking day with the kids.
 - They also run a life skills evening once a week
 - Fall clean up of the yard and house at the end of October,
 - There are patching and painting jobs in the house
- **Downtown Health Clinic**
 - Has a drop in centre. Looking for volunteers to be present regularly and befriend people who come into the drop in centre.
 - Maybe help them fill out a medical form, to listen to them.
 - Relationship is key.

These are not 'somewhere over the rainbow' opportunities for someday, these opportunities are available now. And will continue to be available.

- These and other opportunities are partnerships we can have. They can be done with a Circle Group, or individually.
- We will be working on making opportunities available and knowing what chances for meaningful partnership are in the community.

A Bedrock of Support

- Even if not all of us are in the hands on, this is something we are doing as a church body and it will require our support.
- Prayer – the kind of work people will be doing is significant. Pray for them.
- Finances – These partnerships with those we are mentoring / in the pods will require funding as we help people get setup with housing and primary needs.
 - **Contribute to the CARE ministry.**
- We working together can do much.

[FILL OUT ONE OF THE INFORMATION CARDS FOR MORE DETAILS](#)
[WE WILL SEND MORE INFO ON OPTIONS TO YOU WITHIN THE NEXT WEEK.](#)

How Today's Passage Connects...

Psalm 68:5–6 (LEB)

A father to orphans and a judge for widows, is God in his holy habitation.

God settles the lonely in a home; he brings prisoners out into prosperity. But the rebellious abide in a barren land.

As I considered all these things, my heart was led back to this passage from Psalms, that I read earlier in the service, and it occurred to me, that all the words that talk about God in this passage are relational.

- Father to the fatherless (orphans)
- Judge (or advocate) for widows

- Someone to stand up for them
- Someone who leads captives free.
- “God settles the lonely in a home”
 - Or God sets the lonely in families
- Word for home is not a building, it is a ‘household’
 - God gives those who are alone, a family, relationships

As a staff, it made us think of a story of someone we know.

Stephen Harris (with permission)

- Stephen had a rough life growing up, ended up in jail and got out in 2003.
- Back in 2005 he was in Fredericton, and homeless.
- Slept in a storage tent we had in our parking lot. Stayed there between 8-10 months.
 - A friend would sneak him food at night.
 - We would provide him help a few times, not knowing his exact situation, Wayne had helped him and talked with him.
- Al Ingraham and Sulley (a friend) got him to the shelter so he could get an address and get a check.
 - Relationship continued, went to Overcomers (like our Monday 12 step group), helped around the church, got connected to 50+.
 - Eventually helped lead the Overcomers group, decorated our Christmas trees out front, made connections.
 - Is now not a taker, but a giver. Struggles with health sometimes.

God’s justice is not just economic, is not just material, it is also relational

- As we look at what we have, we have the opportunity to be present with people, to show Christ’s love to people, in materials, but also in presence.

God wants a relationship with you.

John 1:12 (NIV84)

12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

Jesus did not come to earth to sell fire insurance (get out of hell), he came to bring us into relationship with the Father that changes everything.

Discussion Questions:

1. In Psalm 68, it says God 'sets the lonely in a home', which can mean family or household. Have you experienced being drawn in when you are lonely, or drawing someone lonely into relationship? What happened? What would it look like to do that for others?
2. Sometimes we struggle to move from knowing 'we should' do something about injustice or poverty and then moving to 'we will' do something. What options from the list of things we could do was something that stirred your heart or is something you could do?
3. Pastor Chad talked about how God is relational. Look at the words in Psalm 68 again, and John 1:12. Do you think of God in relational terms? Are there times you haven't? What does God's desire for a relationship mean to you today?

ⁱ <http://www.bringinglethbridgehome.ca/sites/default/files/NEWS%20RELEASE%202016%20PiT%20Count.pdf>