

February 17. Read Proverbs 31:8-9. Speak up! This verse is a command to literally open our mouths for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. We are admonished to judge fairly and defend the rights of the poor and needy. In this chapter, the king is receiving instruction from his mother. The king was wealthy and with his status, he had the power to impact the futures of many. This is “motherly advice” we can all take to heart. You may think, “I’m not wealthy,” but remember that more than a third of the world lives on less than \$2 a day. That makes it very probable that you are among the wealthy in the world today. *An advocate is one who speaks up for and defends the rights of another.* We can be an advocate for those who are destitute and we can defend the rights of the poor and needy. In fact, that is the heartbeat of World Vision. With the help of child sponsors around the world, we defend the rights of children and communities in poverty. That passion compels us to action. Children and families in poverty are particularly vulnerable to injustice. What can you do today to speak up for a child? Can you defend the rights of the poor and needy?

February 18. Read Proverbs 22:22-23. In the culture of this verse, servants of the royal court had power that could be easily abused. That abuse led to gain for the powerful, while the poor were often oppressed. This proverb assures us that when oppression occurs, the Lord will take up the case of the poor and be their advocate. The abuse of the needy continues today when justice for the poor is overlooked. In James chapter 2, we learn how easy it is to slip into favoritism of the rich over the poor. The rich would often use their powers to drag the poor into court. Maybe we’re not dragging the poor to court in an attempt to exploit them, but are we actively serving the neediest among us? We may not be abusing them directly, but are we protecting those who are most vulnerable to exploitation? We learn that God “takes up the case” of those who have been crushed. When we follow His lead, we become an advocate for the poor—doing whatever we can to fight for justice. If that culture spoke of justice in regard to poverty, we are wise to listen and follow their example.

February 19. Read Proverbs 3:27-28. Acquire wisdom. That is the theme of Proverbs chapter 3, and the chapter exhorts us to give up the desires for self-sufficiency and self-determination and instead turn to wisdom. Wisdom alone leads to life. There are three instructions, followed by five prohibitions. We are going to focus on the prohibition of verses 27-28, but you are encouraged to study the entire chapter of Proverbs 3. Proverbs 3:27-28 implies that a right relationship with God will result in right associations with our neighbors and those in our sphere of influence. We’re not sure what is owed in this verse—maybe it’s a payment for work, a debt to repay, a gift, or a loan to help in a time of need. We’re not told what “it” is, but we know that putting it off to tomorrow is not the correct decision. We have opportunity to do good today! Who is your neighbor? Luke 10 tells us your neighbor is the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, and those in prison. It’s anyone with whom you come into contact—your coworkers, the barista at the coffee shop, those you live around you, your friends, your fitness trainer, and the people at the football game. God has made them your neighbors in life. Have you been withholding good from your neighbor? Take care of that today. We know that a right relationship with God results in love for those around us. God’s love is evidenced in us as we love others as we have been loved.

February 20. Read Proverbs 11:25. Remember that hot summer day when you intensely craved a cold drink of water? You were parched and severely needed just a taste. When you finally held that glass in your hands and filled your mouth with liquid, how did it feel? Refreshing! Did you know that giving generously is also refreshing? That’s what this Proverb says. Are we generous in our giving or do we withhold? It all comes down to our view of possessions. Just a few verses later in this chapter, we’re reminded that “those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.” Several times in Proverbs we are cautioned to be aware that wealth does not push us toward evil or lure us toward greed. Instead, a generous person will prosper! Generosity yields an amazing crop! When we refresh others through giving, we are refreshed ourselves. As Luke 6:38 says, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Let’s ask God for a generous heart so that His love can be shared with others—like a refreshing drink of water.

February 21. Read Proverbs 14:20-21. Irony. Yes, it's ironic that those who need friends don't have them. The rich are generally surrounded by friends, but the poor often go without helpful relationships. Why? There are numerous reasons, but one is that it can be costly to be a friend of someone who is poor. This verse says very bluntly that it is a sin to despise your neighbor by failing to help them. How can we be kind to the needy? We can offer a relationship to someone who is in need. Those in need are often without friends. We can go out of our way to help befriend someone who needs it most. We can refuse to despise our neighbor. The word "despise" is often used in the sense of cheating someone, but the cheating doesn't have to be physical. It can also be emotional. Do we look down on our neighbors who are poorer than us as somehow less intelligent or less driven? That is also despising our neighbor. Kindness to our neighbors can go a long way to sharing God's love with them. What can you do to show God's kindness and love to a needy neighbor today? According to Proverbs 14, you will be blessed!