Room to Breathe

Proverbs 21:5, 20; Luke 14:25–33; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2; 2 Corinthians 8:12–15
In the series "Enough: Finding freedom in a world that always wants more"

Imagine you're driving home when you hear a sound you were hoping not to hear. Something is wrong with the car. You take it in, and the person behind the counter tells you what it will take to fix it. You listen. You ask a question. And somewhere in that conversation, your mind starts doing another calculation.

If we pay for this, what waits? The electric bill? Groceries? Something the kids need? The repair is one problem. Figuring out what can't be paid because of the repair is another. Some of us know that calculation very well. Others could pay for the repair, but we know a similar pressure elsewhere. Every evening is spoken for. Every bit of energy has a destination.

What we long for in those moments is a little space between the problem and the next decision. Room to think. Room to ask a question. Room to respond with care. Room to breathe. Let's take that literally for a moment. Wherever you are right now, take one slow breath with me. Finding room to breathe is where we're headed today in our series, *Enough*.

We began by noticing the gifts we receive. Last week, we remembered the people who shaped us. Today we ask how to care for our lives and resources in the circumstances we actually face. Those circumstances differ.

Some households are managing rising costs on retirement income. Some are balancing work, transportation, children's needs, and care for aging parents. Some have lost income or faced expenses no one could have anticipated. Some of us have resources, but our spending or commitments

need attention. Others have already made careful choices, cut what could be cut, and still do not have enough. We need enough honesty to tell the difference.

Telling someone to plan better when their income can't cover necessities solves nothing. Telling someone with real flexibility that nothing can change doesn't help either. The next faithful step won't look the same for every household.

But wherever we begin, we begin within God's love. Long before we ever balance a budget, God's grace has gone ahead of us. Our financial circumstances do not decide our worth, and needing help does not place us outside the life of faith. With that foundation, we can listen to the wisdom in Proverbs.

Proverbs gives us short sayings that help us recognize patterns in life. Proverbs 21:5 contrasts careful planning with haste. Most of us have felt the difference between a decision made with time to think and one made when we are exhausted, frightened, or feeling pushed. There are purchases we make because we need something, and purchases we make because we've had a hard day and want to feel a little better. There are commitments we accept because they matter, and others we accept because we are uncomfortable saying, "I can't do that right now." Proverbs invites us to slow down enough to notice.

But a proverb is not a promise that careful people will always become financially secure. Illness happens. Jobs change. People work hard and still struggle. We misuse this passage if we turn it into an explanation for why someone else is poor.

Another proverb, 21:20, gives us a household picture: precious treasure and oil in the home of the wise. Oil was an ordinary necessity, so this is a home with something set aside for a future need. When resources allow it, preparation can be a gift. But someone who spends all their income on housing, food, and medicine has not behaved foolishly. Sometimes careful planning reveals a hard truth: the resources are insufficient. Seeing that clearly can be the beginning of asking for help. So, the question is larger than, "How much have I saved?" It is, "Am I facing what is actually happening, and what response would help?"

Jesus offers a similar picture in Luke 14: someone stopping to consider what is involved. A person wants to build a tower. Before beginning, the builder sits down and calculates the cost. Is there enough to finish? Then Jesus adds a king deciding whether to enter a battle. Both pictures involve stopping to reckon with reality before proceeding. We do so much reacting on our feet, on our phones, late at night when we have little patience left. There is wisdom in sitting down before we say yes.

But we need to hear why Jesus tells these stories. He is talking about following him. Crowds are traveling with him, and he wants them to understand that following will shape their whole lives. Their relationships. Their loyalties. Their willingness to bear a cost. And their possessions. Jesus ends this teaching with demanding words about letting go of what we own. He is asking for more than a religious activity added to everything else. Following Jesus means allowing his way of love to reshape decisions we might otherwise regard as entirely our own.

That includes our money. It includes whether we will keep acquiring something simply because we can. It includes whether maintaining an appearance has become more important than living truthfully. It includes whether we see another person's need as any concern of ours.

For those of us with greater resources, this passage asks what we may need to release so that we can follow Jesus more freely and care for others more fully. And for those who are struggling, it does not turn financial need into a failure of faith.

Jesus is calling a community of followers. We are learning his way together. A spending plan can help us see our circumstances. Following Jesus gives us a direction for what we do with what we see. That direction is love of God and love of neighbor. John Wesley, the founder of our Methodist movement, put it this way: gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can. For Wesley, the first two served the third, and none of it was ever to harm our health or our neighbor. And in that love, we ourselves are among the neighbors whose lives need care.

Food matters. Medicine matters. Safe housing matters. Necessary rest matters. God's grace meets us before we have put everything in order, and it doesn't leave us where it found us. It keeps working within us, helping us grow, reconsider, and respond. We don't have to earn our place before we can begin.

That becomes especially clear in Paul's letters to the church in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul is organizing a collection for believers in Jerusalem who need help. He asks the Corinthians to set resources aside regularly, according to their means. Their planning has a purpose: people elsewhere

need care. Later, in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul says that giving is measured by what someone has, rather than what they do not have. And he says the goal is not relief for some while others are under pressure, but a fair balance. People with resources help meet the needs of people without enough, and those receiving the gift belong to the same community as those giving it.

Sometimes room to breathe comes from a reserve we were able to build. Sometimes it comes from a change we need to make. And sometimes it comes because another person shares. Receiving help is part of our life together. It creates no debt of belonging that must later be repaid through money, attendance, or service.

So, what might a next step look like this week? Let me offer three possibilities. Choose the one that fits where you are.

First, if essentials exceed income, your next step may be seeking support. You may have been running these numbers for months, and you do not need another reason to feel ashamed. A beginning might be a private conversation with someone you trust: "I need help exploring what is available." You can speak with me, and we can consider what assistance or referrals may be possible. We may not have an immediate answer, but you do not have to solve everything before starting the conversation. And if giving to the church would leave you unable to meet essential needs, reducing or pausing that giving can be an appropriate choice. Your place here remains the same.

Second, if essentials are covered but finances feel fragile, your next step may be looking ahead at one expense. Just one. A renewal. A seasonal bill. School expenses. Maintenance you know will eventually be needed. Ask when

it is likely to arrive and what it will cost. Then consider what is possible. Perhaps you can begin setting something aside. Perhaps you need more information. Perhaps you discover that you will need help. You do not have to repair your entire financial life in one sitting.

Third, if your resources allow flexibility, your next step may involve preparation and meaningful sharing. Consider whether something you spend on still serves what matters to you, and what would help you prepare responsibly for future needs. And consider who might have more room to breathe because you have room to share. Following Jesus can lead us to change a plan, release a purchase, or make generosity a regular part of our lives. The question is personal: "What response is love asking of me, given what I actually have?" Whatever your step, remember that the person matters more than the numbers.

At Monroe UMC, support for the food pantry is one way shared resources become care. Groceries meet an essential need and give a household a little more room elsewhere. Last week, we said that God's love often reaches us through ordinary people: someone willing to listen, someone who helps with food or transportation, someone who helps us face a choice we have been avoiding. We can become a community where those conversations are possible, a place where we use resources thoughtfully, share responsibility, and receive care with dignity.

Think again about the person standing at the repair counter, wondering what will have to wait. We cannot promise that following Jesus will prevent that moment. We can take seriously the choices that help us prepare when preparation is possible. We can tell the truth when the resources are

insufficient. And we can care enough about one another that the person facing that moment has someone to turn to.

God's love is already reaching toward us. We can bring our real circumstances into that love: the decisions that need attention, the needs we cannot meet alone, and the resources we can share. This week, take one faithful next step. And where we have capacity, let's help make that step possible for someone else.

Amen.