

INTRO TO 2016 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Lent is a season of reflection and repentance. It invites us to look inside our hearts, seeing ourselves with compassion and truth – to see our brokenness and our beauty, our failings and our faithfulness. In this season we're inviting you to enter into a deeper commitment to the way of Jesus. Traditionally, Christians were encouraged to enter into a fast – giving up something – thereby turning our thoughts to God and the abundant blessings that God provides. Lent is also a time when we can take on additional actions that heighten our awareness of God calling us to meet the needs of others.

This devotional booklet is intended to open our hearts to the needs of many who are presently without the security and sanctuary of a home. This discipline of prayer and self-reflection is critical in opening our minds just a little wider and making our hearts just a bit more pliable in order to see and respond to the needs around us.

*It is not you that shapes God,
it is God that shapes you.
If you are the work of God,
await the hand of the artist who does all things in due season.
Offer him your heart, soft and tractable, and keep the form
in which the artist has fashioned you.
Let your clay be moist, lest you grow hard and lose the imprint of his fingers.*
--Attributed to St. Irenaeus

You may choose to take it one step further and sacrifice one dollar a day to helping those in need in your own community by supporting the work of Helping Hands Gospel Mission. Forty days of Lent equals \$40 toward helping “the least of these.”

May God bless you as continue to grow in Him. This series is available for download at our website.

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Week 1 Feb 15-19

Though Lent traditionally begins Ash Wednesday, this devotion series has been created with a Monday through Friday approach. Feel free to adapt it any way that works best for you.



Homelessness

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Psalm 107: 4-9

Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things. NRSV

For those of us reading this devotional, we probably don't have a personal experience with being homeless. I remember one time going with my family and our church to feed a group of homeless people under the expressway downtown. My son was about 3 years old. On the way home, we talked about why all those people were there and the fact that they were homeless. "Well, we need to get them a home," he wisely said in response.

The psalmist speaks of those wandering in desert wastes, unable to find a town, being both hungry and thirsty. Perhaps we are to take this figuratively and think about when we have been desert wanderers in our lives. Or maybe the imagery harks back to the people of Israel wandering in the desert. But I like to think more of a literal meaning: homelessness.

In each case, it is God who gives direction. God provides a way out of the desert - whether real or figurative. God provides shelter, food and drink. Maybe God's face looks like the volunteer from the shelter - but it is God's face all the same.

Prayer: Thank you, God, that you provide the way out of the desert. Thank you that we can be your instruments and your hands. Thank you that we can be grateful for all the good things you provide in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Blessed is the One Who is Kind to the Needy

By Jonathan Ziman

Proverbs 14:21

It is a sin to despise one's neighbor, but blessed is the one who is kind to the needy.

For most of my life I thought poverty was a problem limited to cities and “third-world countries.” The solution, I assumed, was to send more money overseas and to increase access to schools in the inner cities. I sent money to help fund famine relief in Ethiopia and argued passionately for public school reform and increased spending from the government.

Since graduating from college, my eyes have been opened to the far more complex realities of poverty and the incredible challenges that face us as we look for lasting, long-term solutions. I've served at soup kitchens, and been served at food pantries. I've helped people apply for public aid, and been treated poorly by cashiers and sales clerks as I have personally used food stamps and coupons to buy food for my family.

It turns out that the problems I thought were limited to the inner cities are present right here in my own neighborhood. Less than half a mile from where I live in Wheaton is a low-income apartment complex filled with refugees from other countries. While I try to figure out how to get a greener, more weed-free lawn, they are wondering how to pay the next month's rent.

The issues are far more complex than can be addressed in a single devotional. In any given week my emotions may range from enormous compassion for a specific individual to guilt because I'm not “doing” enough to frustration and anger because I feel like I'm being manipulated. The easy way out of all of this is to resort to denial; to turn a blind eye and pretend it's not really there; to look the other way. The Bible, however, doesn't give us that option. In the Book of Proverbs alone there are numerous commands to care for the poor. Consider the following:

I have not yet figured this all out. I don't have a neat and tidy solution to give you that will alleviate your guilt and provide a 100% sustainable system for caring for the poor and needy without enabling others and creating patterns of dependence. What we are all called to do, however, is to keep our hearts open to caring for others. Not having the perfect solution doesn't exempt us from trying to find one. Do not make the mistake of shutting the poor out of your heart simply because you don't know how to help.

If God calls me to care for the poor, then I need to care for the poor. If that's part of what is means to be “wise,” then I need to figure out how to do it. Perhaps that starts with simply praying for a heart of compassion. Or repenting for letting my heart grow cold. Ask God for guidance, and then follow through as He leads you.

Prayer: Lord, please make it clear if you are calling me to get involved, especially for the poor. Also let me know how to do that and what it looks like. Amen

A Pair of Glasses

A pair of glasses is all part of the process to getting her family out of poverty.

Linda Bailey

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

v.11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God (TNIV Bible)

Sponsoring a child is one of the best things I have ever done. Knowing that I have been involved in a child's physical, spiritual and educational development truly warms my heart.

Just the other week I was contacted by my sponsorship agency. My sponsor child needed glasses, however, this medical assistance was beyond the monthly support we give.

It was a no-brainer as to whether we would buy the glasses for our sponsor child. Glasses would help with her studies, her studies help her to get a job, and a job helps her to support her family.

It seems quite simplistic, however, a pair of glasses is all part of the process to getting her family out of poverty.

I will never see those glasses, I will never see the work she completes using the glasses, and I will never see the smile on her mother's face when she brings home good grades. But I still feel that I am the one who is more blessed with being able to give than those who are receiving.

Every person has something to give. It may not be money, but it might be wisdom, love, honesty, accommodation...

There is no end to the ways we can give to others.

God has blessed every single person with the ability to share, it's just that we often don't exercise this gift. When we don't give to others we actually miss out on the benefits.

Anyone who has given knows that the true gift is the joy we feel knowing we have blessed someone else.

Prayer: Lord, You are the ultimate giver. May we learn by Your great example and be generous to all we meet. Amen.

Embracing the Inconvenient

Leslie Ludy

John 20:21

“So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’”
(NKJV)

I will never forget the day my son Hudson learned what an orphan was. A close family friend had just returned from Haiti where she visited an orphanage and had taken heartbreaking photos of destitute children in desperate need of loving homes.

As a wide-eyed 3-year-old, Hudson stared at the pictures and asked, “Who dose kids? Why dey sad?” I explained that the children in the photos were orphans, children without a mommy or daddy. As Hudson pondered this, his heart was gripped with compassion. He suggested we go to Haiti and bring home 20 orphans to live with us.

I smiled at his childish enthusiasm and then informed him I didn’t think we’d have room in our house for 20 more children. A few days later, Hudson led me upstairs to see several “orphan beds” he’d created. Each bed consisted of a blanket, a pillow and one of his favorite stuffed animals.

There were two orphan beds in Mommy and Daddy’s room, two in his sister’s room, and five in Hudson’s bedroom. (He’d taken the greatest burden of caring for these orphans upon himself!) “See?” he exclaimed. “We do have room!” I was speechless.

God was using my 3-year-old to remind me of His simple solution for the orphaned, the destitute and the starving: sacrificially sharing what we have with those in need.

That day, God challenged my heart with some poignant questions: Was I willing to serve the weak, even if it required personal sacrifice? If Hudson was willing to share his mommy, daddy, bedroom and favorite stuffed animals with children in need — then what was I willing to share?

Those questions changed the course of my life. While we didn’t bring home 20 orphans, God has led us to adopt four children in need of a loving home. The journey has not been easy, but through it we have seen God’s amazing faithfulness.

Throughout history, the Christians who’ve made the most impact for God’s kingdom rarely lived comfortable or convenient lives. Their mighty acts for God required enormous personal sacrifice and a willingness to venture far beyond the realm of the easy and convenient. If today’s Christians are too busy, who will take up the torch of Gospel-centered rescue work in this generation?

Prayer: Lord, help me learn to look past myself and see the needs of others. Teach me to love others the way You love them, sacrificially. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Perfection

Lonnie Selje

Philippians 3:12-15

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

We often talk about being “Christ-like.” Many moan that we’ll never achieve that perfection. But how often do we think about how God has lowered Himself to be seen through us in this dark world?

Think about it...

David...a man after God’s own heart...blew it several times

Moses...the most humble of men...messed up and missed out on the Promised Land

Noah...trusted to save the planet...got drunk

Solomon...wisest man ever to live...not smart enough to listen to God’s warnings

...the list goes on...you get it.

The attainment of perfection is one we place on ourselves...a goal we can’t meet. We set ourselves up for failure. All the while God has come to our level, First He lowered Himself (as mentioned in Hebrews 2, to live among us and save us. Secondly He allows us, in our imperfection, to share His name...Christian (Acts 11.) God uses us (not holy angels) to be the light in this dark world and salt of the earth (Matthew 5.) Yes, He uses us in our imperfect state.

I’m not saying we should avoid trying to better ourselves or be more like Him...I’m just saying God doesn’t expect what we can’t achieve...why do we?

Prayer: Lord, help me to not be so hard on myself and to just strive to be what You want me to be...to do what You would have me do...to accept myself as You created me. Amen

Week 2 – Feb. 22-26

Helping Hands primarily works with the homeless in South Wood County. But with the lack of a local shelter our ministry has become one of walking beside people as they attempt to get back on their feet. The process often takes six months or longer.



Homeless... the shattered dream.

by Steve

Corinthians 4:16-18

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

I've often thought about the homeless man I met the other day. I've seen him from time to time around town and I'll think about him of course as I sit in the comfort and warmth of my own home late in the evening. I wonder if he's ok, is he warm enough, has he eaten today? Those thoughts go through my mind. I wonder what it must be like to be homeless and how frustrating that would be. I'm sure everyone has goals and dreams and longs to be successful in their life, and being homeless is most likely not one of those dreams or goals. I guess it just happens sometimes. A series of unfortunate events and there you are. It can happen to anyone I suppose. One thing for sure in my own life, things did not go as I had planned or dreamed they ever would. In some areas of my life I've been blessed beyond measure. My career, my parents and sisters, my wife and children, also my health, there's so much to be thankful for and I've never dreamed that these blessings would be so wonderful as they are. Yet there are other events in my life that have caused such pain and suffering and I would have never dreamed or imagined that I would be going through. For instance my son's addiction to drugs and the serious consequences of this and the pain this has caused not only himself but the whole family as well. I've watched it drain the excitement of life right out of my wife, not only her but with me as well. We had such dreams for our children. We both praise the Lord for our youngest son and the decisions he's made in his life. What a responsible young man he has become, but with our oldest son the plans or dreams we had for him were shattered due to choices and events that we didn't expect. I never saw it coming either. It just happened, or at least that's how it seemed. Of course there were a series of events that took place over a period of time but the reality of it is what hits you hard. As your working through it, you think maybe you'll get a handle on it, but then you realize that you can't. It's too deep, too far gone now. There's no going back, only moving forward and pressing on through the mess before us. It's hard and difficult and the tendency is to think back, to return to the dream, but all that does is remind you that it didn't happen the way you had hoped and you go through the hurt all over again. I think it's best to move on, plan new dreams and goal from where you are today. The old ones are gone, but new ones exist. You just have to push past and through the crushed ones laying in your way. These crushed dreams seem to block your view from the new ones, or at least for a while they do. I guess it's because of the morning and sorrow we go through and that takes time to heal.

Back to Jerry, the homeless man I met the other day. I don't know what series of events caused this man to be alone and homeless, but whatever changed his hopes and dreams, I hope he finds the strength to create new ones.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for those I know and love who are facing unexpected things. Give them strength and wisdom to deal with it. Help me not judge those in tough situations, but as I wonder what events brought them to that point, use me to help give them strength to make changes.

Serving The Least

Matthew 25:31-36

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ (ESV)

Jesus provides a vivid and explicit picture of how when He returns to finally establish His kingdom he will separate people “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” His litmus test to determine whether we’re truly part of His kingdom seems simple and clear: however we treat the least of these- the hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick, and imprisoned- is how we treat Him.

We can examine our lives and see how we respond to the least of these and know whether the good news of God’s kingdom took root in our lives. During His earthly ministry, Jesus and His followers constantly pursued those who seemed far from God and forgotten by society. As His followers, He calls us to do the same today. We can choose to ignore those people in the world around us and miss an amazing opportunity to experience Jesus. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Who are the least of these in your community?
- How do you personally respond to those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick, and imprisoned?
- How do you think our response to the least of these reveals whether we’re truly part of God’s kingdom?

Prayer: God, give me Your heart for the least of these in my community and show me how I can join You in Your activity.

BURDENS

BY MELANIE GIBBONS

Galatians 6:2, 5

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ ... For all must carry their own loads.

These verses seemed a contradiction to me for many years, until I learned more about the difference between "burdens" and "loads." Here's how I think of it now: a load is like a backpack full of the things one person needs to carry with them to make it through the day. A burden is like a cart. One person could pull it if they have to, but it's really made to be pulled by a team.

That's how I think of compassion work in the world. Through development projects that help build resilience, deepen resources and expand knowledge, we enable people and communities to "carry their own loads." But when an emergency comes — a flood, an earthquake, a conflict, even a drought — the load grows into something bigger. It becomes a burden.

Here's where we come in. We are called to fulfill Christ's law by bearing one another's burdens. And the good news is this; because it's Christ law, by the power of the cross it has already been fulfilled. Now it is a calling that's given to us through grace. It's a calling we don't face alone but with the whole body of Christ. Through your prayers, generous gifts and donations of Quilts and Kits, we reach out together as Christ's hands in the world.

PRAYER: Thank you, God, for calling us to work alongside you in our global community. Give us the strength and wisdom to reach out at the right time and in the right way to help bear one another's burdens when the load grows too heavy. Amen.

Giving Ourselves

Lonnie Selje

Acts 16

⁷ *When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.* ⁸ *So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.*

The nature of some of my work is in showing people the difference between helping vs. enabling them. This week I was reminded of a very important component to helping.

In this day and age, we are quick to write a check or even give a few dollars to someone on the street. But it isn't always money they need. Oh, they may want it, and they may take it, but it's not what they need.

Helping Hands Gospel Mission has a policy of not giving gas cards to people without a valid driver's license and proof of insurance. We don't want to encourage anyone to break the law, and both of those are law in Wisconsin. Someone I have been working with for a bit asked for gas. She couldn't afford to even register her car. I could have offered her cab fare, but instead chose to offer to take her to the store myself. (Trust me, it was divine leading and not thoughtfulness on my part.)

Now you have to know me to understand that shopping is not my passion. I typically run to the store on the spur of the moment, doing as many things as possible in the shortest amount of time when there are the fewest number of people in the store. I have been known to fill a cart and be back on the road in record time. So taking the time to schedule a trip to the store, and wait for someone who had limited resources to figure out how to purchase some necessities was not part of my game plan.

I realized something in that process. We give too much money and not enough of ourselves. This person knew the sacrifice to give her my time, and I knew in that moment that today's world is too disconnected. We text, we tweet, we Facebook, but we don't give people time. Our presence has the same power of Jesus'. It's through our time and presence that we touch their hearts and lives.

While at the store doing some of my own shopping, I ran into someone from church and had a wonderful chat, catching up like you don't get to in the hustle and bustle of a Sunday morning. On my way out I ran into a woman from the assisted living home I do Sunday services at and chatted briefly. This was the first time we were able to connect beyond the superficial, "Hi, are you coming to services today?" For the first time she knew that I knew who she was, and that I cared about her as a person. I'm curious to see if she decides to come to church services now, or how she might greet me when I'm visiting the home.

Oh, and the person I took shopping in the first place. She asked me to pick her up for church Sunday morning. It all makes me wonder how many divine appointments I've missed by producing quantity vs. quality!

Prayer: Most Gracious God, don't allow me to miss any more of your Divine Appointments in my life. Make me more sensitive to your leading, no matter the inconvenience I may feel.
Amen

I Am Poor and Needy

(by Pastor Jason Coker)

Psalm 86.1

Hear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

In America there's almost nothing worse than to be poor and needy. America is the land of strong, relentless workers. Workers who won't take poverty for an answer, who look hardship squarely in the face and pull themselves out of the pit by sheer determination and grit. These are our heroes, men and women with an "I can" attitude and a rags-to-riches-story, the American dream of which we all drink deeply.

To be poor in the midst of a wealth that can be freely earned is shameful to American sensibilities. Be honest, isn't it hard sometimes to look squarely upon people who have their hand out? Isn't there - even among the most compassionate among us - a distant sense of being puzzled by a poor person, or a lingering aftertaste of bitterness, or perhaps even for some of us the hearts hair-trigger, explosively firing off accusations and condemnation?

Scripture, of course, explicitly teaches the value of a strong work ethic. "How long will you lie there you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man." (Proverbs 6: 9-11) We celebrate these passages, and rightly so, for in them is great wisdom for life, but I think our problems with the poor run deeper than simply the abhorrence of laziness, for clearly the reality of poverty is more complicated than mere laziness. Some of the hardest working people in America are among our poorest.

Instead, our embarrassment of the poor and needy is at least partly entangled with the impression that by their very existence they repeatedly utter the two dirtiest words in American English: "I can't." People who say such things are beyond our patience. Just ask yourself, how would your thoughts respond to someone saying these words? "I can't pay my rent; I can't take care of my kids; I can't hold down a good job; I can't take care of myself. I can't, I can't, I can't..." Rather than mercy, such people tend to reap our total rejection to the point of blind indifference. To be counted among such people is the worst possible condition for proud Americans. Would you rather be a sick person "fighting" your illness, or a "charity case" living off someone else's benevolence? Most of us would choose the former.

And herein lies our spiritual problem, for in the Kingdom of God there's nothing better than to be poor and needy. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt 5:3) Here Jesus is merely echoing age-old wisdom. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17) says David, and Isaiah seems to agree when he offers us this from the Lord, "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."

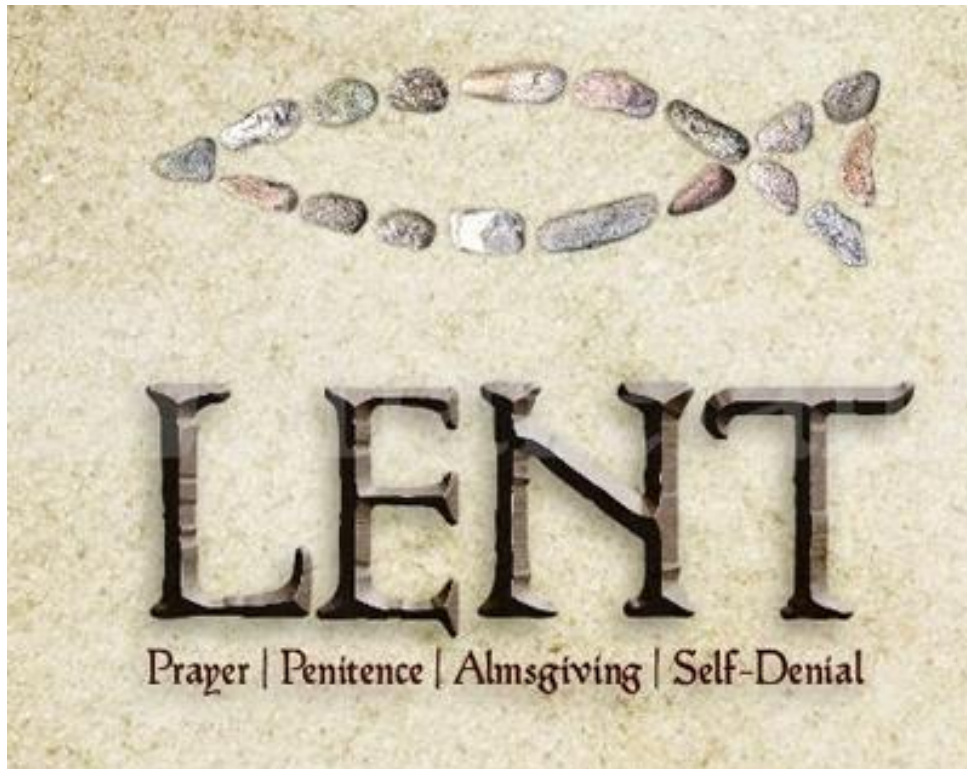
Not only do we all need the mercy of others from time to time, but from the vantage point of eternity we need the mercy of God all the time! We are forever destined to live off the charity of the Lord. As long as we insist upon our self-sufficiency, we will remain distant from God, but once we've realized we are truly poor and needy, God will dwell with us.

Prayer: Gracious God, cleanse my heart of judging others, reminding me that You alone can judge. Give me wisdom to truly help people, but more importantly, to love them with the same type of love You so generously give to me. Amen

Week 3 – Feb. 29 – March 4

Missions reach around the world, beginning in our own back yards. How do we do it all? With God's guidance we can discover His calling on our individual lives. Ask Him, and He'll show you. *Matthew 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*

NIV



I turn my back on the homeless

posted in [Devotions](#) by [weeklydevotion.com](#) (by Mitch)

1 Corinthians 13:12

“For now we see in a glass, dimly, but then we shall see face to face”

I have a parking permit for the lot across from my church.

It’s a busy lot, and occasionally full by the time I get to work. Typically, though, there are a few spots available in the back row.

Those spots fill up last for two reasons: They’re the farthest from the street, and they’re also the spots adjacent to the homeless shelter.

The shelter is over-crowded, and many of the people spend their time outside. Usually there are 5-10 people huddled in small groups, just talking and passing the time a few feet from where I park. I pull in and glance a little nervously at them through my dirty windshield. I make sure to lock my doors.

There is a moment, very brief, when I step out of my car and am facing their direction. Sometimes I make eye contact, but usually not. Then, I heave a small sigh of helplessness, turn my back on them, and head the opposite direction into the church.

I’m not suggesting my church has turned its back on the homeless. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, this week we received a beautiful plaque from the shelter naming members of our church “Volunteers of the year”.

Our church provides space for “Jubilee Cafe”, a breakfast kitchen that operates twice a week. Members serve along with other churches at LINK, the Lawrence Interdenominational Nutrition Kitchen. Our church is one of many who participate in Family Promise, where families with young children stay at the church for a week and are cared for by members of the church. Our pastor’s fund provides help on a case by case level for those needing deposit money for moving into an apartment.

I’m so proud of the people in my church who help our community’s homeless people. But I don’t always feel like I’m one of them. I realize that although I encourage our members to help out in so many ways, I need to be involved, too.

And so, I’ve signed up to help with the next Family Promise week. I’m one of the people on the prep team. We’ll be re-configuring furniture and setting up cots in several classrooms, so that the families who come to stay will feel comfortable and welcome. I may not actually meet any of our visitors this time, but it’s a step in the right direction. Next time, I may even stay overnight. We’ll see.

God has called us to do more than see these precious people through a windshield, dimly.

God calls us to love them...Face to Face.

Prayer: God, help me stop turning my back on the things You want me to see. Show me how You were able to love them and give me the strength to do just that.

LOVE

BY MELANIE GIBBONS

John 13

“After Jesus had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you.”

Several years ago, I went to visit my grandmother in rural Virginia. The timing of the trip happened to coincide with the annual Love Feast held at her Church of the Brethren congregation. A Love Feast is a celebration and remembrance of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet and the Lord’s Supper. She was so excited for me to attend this special event with her.

What I remember from that event was simple. Grandmother washed my feet. I washed hers.

I am thankful for this memory, for this tradition that put flesh and bone to story in John. For me, it’s also an example of my family’s emphasis of serving others. Not because we’re somehow better, but in response to the incredible, humble, sacrificial love Christ gave first to us.

Sometimes, foot washing involves a basin and a towel. Other times, it could look like a team spending months listening to a community in preparation for a new project.

PRAYER Lord who comes to us with a basin and towel, thank you for your example of service to the world. You call us to serve all those around the world, from the Philippines to Colombia to Uganda and all nations in-between. Give your servants the strength to go to those places they are needed the most. In Jesus name we pray, AMEN.

FAITH

BY ERIN BROCK

Mark 4:35-41

...*"Do you not care that we are perishing?"*

Frustrated that their teacher is asleep in their storm-swamped boat, the disciples berate Jesus for his apparent indifference to the danger surrounding them. They want him to get up and help them bail water from the boat.

So the disciples are amazed and stunned when Jesus settles the wind and sea. They certainly didn't expect their mortal friend Jesus to calm the storm. Suddenly their image of Jesus takes on another dimension.

Jesus challenges the disciples' expectations, responding not only with weather-altering assistance but also turning around and questioning them, calling them to grow beyond their limited expectations of him, asking, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" Even though fear easily overrides faith under precarious conditions, Jesus urges them to have faith anyway.

What does it mean to have faith in the midst of conflicts and disasters? Are we to wait for Jesus to save the day?

If we instead allow Jesus to challenge our expectations of who he is and how he responds to suffering in the world, our faithful response to disasters and conflicts broadens as well. When we are asleep to the suffering of those in our global "boat," their calls rouse us to action. Despite our shortcomings and fears, Christ acts through us to calm the storms in turmoil ridden places. In amazement, we learn that we are called to be, as Martin Luther said, "little Christs" in service to others. We're called to provide relief to those suffering conflicts and natural disasters and help people rebuild their lives in the following months and years. We're called to speak out for peace. Unhindered by our expectations and fears we're called to respond to those who are perishing, knowing that Jesus is in the boat along with us, working through us.

PRAYER Jesus, who calls us to respond to suffering in the world, empower your people to withstand the chaos of wind and waves. Give peace to those who have known ony war and give comfort to those who have known only cold. In the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, AMEN.

ACCOMPANIMENT

BY DON PEDRO VELIZ

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God? NASB

In order to make sure we are following Micah 6:8, we must ensure that we are not like the bloody Pharisees whose white tunics were always bloody because they didn't want to look at or see the reality of what was happening around them. They walked bent over, with their heads and eyes down so they wouldn't have to see injustice, pain or poverty. As a result of their desire to be blind, they were literally bloody because they bumped into trees and other obstacles. They were figuratively bloody because of what they ignored.

Sometimes we are like the bleeding Pharisees. Sometimes we think that not looking and not seeing what is wrong or unjust around us means that we didn't violate the law. That is not enough. God calls for preventative justice. This preventative justice is very difficult because our sin runs very deep. We are natural sinners and natural transgressors. We try to see how we can be good and sometimes we think we are good. We want to stand with and do good for our fellow man. But we must remember that solidarity isn't just being a "good guy;" we must have disinterested mercy that is worthy of the other person.

The key to be humble before God is to ensure that we are walking with awareness and that we are walking humbly. The best example we can look to for humility and obedience is Jesus. Jesus died on the cross because he did what his father asked of him. He died, nailed to the cross.

The more I have read and thought about Micah 6:8, the more I understand why the passage moves people. Justice, mercy and obedience to God are fundamental elements of compassion work and these three lead to true accompaniment. We need to step back and remember that accompaniment isn't in the papers, the documents or the statistics. Accompaniment isn't just in looking at what is wrong. And accompaniment isn't just in "walking with;" sometimes accompaniment means we need to be like a stone in someone's shoe: never giving up and even possibly annoying until change occurs — to all involved.

What does Micah 6:8 mean to you?

PRAYER Gracious Lord, what do you require of me, but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with you? Fill me with the grace to follow that call, AMEN.

God's Presence in Poverty

Arthur Schoonveld

Matthew 25:31-40

⁴⁰"Whatever you did for one of the least of these ... you did for me."

Back in March 2005, Time magazine featured an article on "How to End Poverty." Inside were pictures of children sleeping on city streets and of a woman scavenging for food on a huge pile of garbage. According to the article, more than 20,000 people die each day because they are too poor to stay alive. At least 1.1 billion people in our world live in extreme poverty. After rereading that article the other day, I turned to Matthew 25, where Jesus says that the nameless millions who die each year represent him. He says, "I tell you the truth, whatever you [do] for one the least of these brothers [and sisters] of mine, you [do] for me." Jesus himself comes to us in these poor billions. He expects us to care, to help. What can we do? We can acquaint ourselves with some of the realities of poverty. We can find out about shelters in our immediate communities. We can set aside a part of our income to give for those who are poor. We can find a trusted organization to send donations. We can designate a part of our church budget to help the poor. Caring for the poor is not an option. As families and as churches, we may have to adjust our priorities. Someday Jesus will ask us, "Did you see me as you looked into the eyes of these brothers and sisters of mine? And what did you do for them?"

Prayer: Lord, forgive us if we have been living in abundance but have failed to reach out to poor people. Help us to see you in people who are in need. For your name's sake, O Lord, Amen.

Week 4 – Mar 7-11

Helping Hands Gospel Mission has changed as needs change in our community. Where people were homeless due to a fire or losing a job, they are now homeless coming out of jail or prison, facing the demons of their addictions.



Homeless - Have you ever contemplated the homelessness of Jesus?

Written by S Benner

Matthew 8:20

“Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’”

This is more than just a metaphorical picture. Jesus didn't have a home. The Bible doesn't mention Him owning anything. In the midst of recording Jesus' teaching, Luke casually mentions that Jesus spent each night on the Mount of Olives, the hill outside Jerusalem.

Though the gospel writers give little attention to this fact, we dare not romanticize it. Surely Jesus did experience beautiful evenings in the olive grove, away from the crowds, with the stars shining overhead. But other nights it rained or even snowed. Sometimes cold winds blew. Jesus endured hard ground, darkness and loneliness.

How does Jesus' homelessness impact us? Though not a command that we must follow, it does require us to pause and think. Too often the desire for comfort drives me. Luxury and convenience become needs rather than wants. Material possessions clutter my focus and prevent me from seeking God. I stress about many things. Jesus owned nothing, yet He didn't worry about His next meal. He trusted God for everything He needed.

I also need to consider my attitudes toward others. Though Jesus likely trained as a carpenter, during the three years of His ministry He didn't work to provide for Himself or for His mother. Did people look at Him and say, “Get a job”? Jesus can help me see differently, because He knows what it's like to be homeless.

Prayer: Holy God, open my eyes to what you want to teach me through these verses. I want to trust You and not worry, to seek You instead of my own comfort, to see every person through Your eyes. Amen

"True Treasure"

Matthew 6:19-20

(Jesus said) "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."

The story begins about a month ago in Vancouver, British Columbia. This story centers around a homeless man who has asked that his name not be shared by the news organizations, which have been telling his tale. The public part of the man's account began when he found a suitcase on the street. Understand, this was not just any old suitcase; this was a suitcase with \$2,000 in it.

Now nobody can tell you whether the man was tempted to keep the money for himself. No, we don't know that, but we do know the homeless man took the suitcase to the police and turned it in. Later on, he explained: it was "the right thing to do." Now that story touched other folks and some of them began to raise money to help the homeless man. More than \$5,000 was raised to help give the man a new start.

Now nobody can tell you if that man had a "check list" of the ways that money could be spent. No, we don't know that, but we do know the homeless man declined the money for himself and asked it be given to a local homeless shelter. They contributors gave him time to reconsider. When they saw the homeless man the next day, he gave them a note. The note reaffirmed his desire to have the shelter benefit from the gift, but the man had now added a request.

He said he would sure appreciate it if someone might help him find permanent employment. By saying that, it shows he understood the old adage: "Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, you feed him for his life."

You know, I wish the rest of the world were as wise as this nameless, homeless man.

Think about it for a moment. We are like that man in Vancouver. We've got nothing. But then the devil and the world walk in and say, "You know, you'd be happy if you owned this or had that or" Well, they come up with a million things that are supposed to make us happy.

And those things might do the trick ... for a short time. But short-term satisfaction is not what we need. Short-term satisfaction doesn't change our circumstance or situation. What we need is something that lasts an eternity. Our happiness, hope and joy in life must be based on a gift that does not tarnish, which can't be lost or stolen.

And that's where the Lord steps in. He says, "Here is My Son. Believe on Him as your Savior; rely on Him and your life now -- as well as throughout eternity -- will be transformed. Not only will you be forgiven all your sins, you will also have the assurance that the Lord is with you and always listening to you. Believe on Jesus as your Savior and you will have a home in heaven and a seat at the eternal banquet.

Prayer: Dear Lord, grant that I have the wisdom to see the contrast between the time-sensitive gifts which are offered by the world and the devil and the eternal blessings which are provided by You, when we are given faith in the Savior. This I ask in His Name. Amen.

AWESOME

BY CHANDLER CARRIKER

Luke 5:26

Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.” (NIV)

There are many strange things around us in this world today. From the strangely absurd that many of us witness every night on reality TV, to the strangely beautiful creation that fills the depths of the ocean. Just think about how many times in a day you find yourself saying “Isn’t that strange?” or “That’s weird!”

While strange is easy to recognize, awe might be a bit more difficult. I know my use of the word “awesome” is just as commonplace today as it was when I, as a teenager, marveled at the discovery of a mint condition Ken Griffey Jr. rookie baseball card.

But what in our daily lives truly fills us with awe? The compassion of one child of God reaching out to another? The startling beauty of God’s creation at a moment we least expect it? What in your daily life has truly filled you with such awe that you have glorified God like these witnesses of Jesus in Luke?

Not long ago, I sat in awe alongside my colleagues as I learned the hopeful news that where malaria once claimed the life of a child every 30 seconds, then every 45 seconds, it has now slowed to every 60 seconds. That 15-second increment may seem minuscule, but it means thousands of lives are saved each day.

Receiving this news places us on sacred ground — where things seem strangely possible in a world that fills us with so much doubt. Sharing this news with you fills me with awe of God’s grace, working through God’s people to achieve a seemingly impossible goal. And we are! And our response to this wonder, to this miracle can only be to glorify God who has called us to this work and given us a spirit of healing to share with the world. Blessings to you as you join us in the work of bringing hope and healing to the world! May our work glorify the strange and awe inducing God who calls us out into the world to heal!

PRAYER God of wonder and awe, fill our lives with your presence so we may go and share with the world. Thank you for those times when you place us on sacred ground and give us the gifts to tell the world of what we have seen. In the name of your Son, Christ Jesus. AMEN.

PRESENCE

BY DAN RUTH

This devotion was written on the one-year anniversary of the Haiti earthquake.

Deuteronomy 31:6

"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you." NASB

Until I met John's family, I had thought of Psalm 23 as "nice," but my faith had never had to really grapple with its true weight. I was working as a hospital chaplain and John was a 15-year-old patient, a twin. When I responded to the request for a chaplain on John's unit, I was pushed aside by nurses and surgeons, beeping carts filled with every instrument imaginable trying to stop John's congenital blood disease from stripping away his life.

Amid the noise and chaos of the hospital room, I noticed a small group of people huddled together at the end of the hall, their faces white with panic. John's family. Having no idea what to say or do, I trudged down the hall and introduced myself, quietly waiting for word from one of the doctors. We waited, and then waited some more. The only thing I could think of was Psalm 23. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me..."

I never met John. In the hours following his death, I sat with his parents and his twin in the dimness of an abandoned waiting room. It was the darkest valley of their life. There was nothing I could say; there was no Bible verse to ease the pain of this untimely death. There was only the promise of God's presence there with them, walking alongside them.

"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." -Matthew 28:20

The path to recovery in Haiti is a slow one. Over the past months, dozens of news accounts have criticized the lack of progress in the aftermath of last year's earthquake. With headlines like "World Turns its Back on Haiti" peppering our newsstands and computer screens, it's easy to give up hope.

PRAYER God of grace, you are here, and for that we give you thanks. You have walked with us through the hardest of times, and your lasting promise gives us life. Help us give the gift of presence to others when they need it, knowing that in your name we'll never abandon them. You restore our soul. Through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. AMEN.

COMPASSION

BY DANIEL LEE

Matthew 27:55

⁵⁵ *Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.*

Have you ever wondered where Jesus and his disciples got their money? How this itinerant carpenter and a grisly group of fishermen funded their evangelistic escapades through first-century Palestine? Women made it possible.

We must assume other funding models were available for Jesus. He might have sought out better-heeled companions, applied for funding from the local Pharisee council or requested a grant from the regional magistrate. But he didn't. The nature of Jesus' ministry didn't mesh with financial support from the ruling class. To minister to the blind and broken, diseased and dying, lonely and lost, he chose a group of rural fisher folk, living on the shores of Galilee. And he chose women as his backers, most specifically "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (Matthew 27:56). These women made it possible.

When viewing ministry, we must also respond with a similar refrain: women make it possible. Certainly, many men contribute their time, money and talents to a ministry that provides food, shelter and a self-determined path out of poverty to millions of people. We celebrate the compassionate calling of all, lifting up our collective efforts to show mercy to all God's children.

At the same time, we also lift up those women who have made it possible. From raising the next generation of faithful Christians, to leading communities across the globe to grow food, dig wells and invest in their future. Our work in 35 countries depends on women. On college campuses and in congregations, women lead by example — drinking Fair Trade coffee, sewing quilts, wrapping Personal Care Kits, giving gifts and sharing their voices in advocacy. In all seasons, as we gather around dining and communion tables, we remember our callings and the divine compassion made incarnate in the Virgin Mary and the grace of the resurrection first witnessed by Mary Magdalene. These women made it possible.

PRAYER God, who chose a woman to deliver his Son, who called women to sustain Christ's ministry and who imparted to women the good news of the resurrection, likewise chooses us in birth, sustains us in life, and imparts good news to us to death. We remember the women of our lives, living and departed, who continue to guide our callings and exemplify the love of Christ in our midst. In Christ Jesus, who gives us life and love, AMEN.

Week 5 – March 14-18

The saying, “It takes a village to raise a child” is no more true than when working with the needy. The support base that is needed when someone is transitioning from a life of poverty and homelessness needs the emotional support of others, financial support as they struggle with deposits to get their own housing, and spiritual support as they seek their spiritual needs and discover God.

Lent



Be Homeless

Written by Courtney McHill, United Methodist Pastor - Posted on July 8, 2013

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (NIV)

In our parable today, the lawyer asks the question, “And who is my neighbor?” This seems like a pretty logical and relevant question. The idea of neighbor could be pretty vast. If you think about it too much you might start to really get overwhelmed about this question. So I understand the lawyer wanting to get to the specifics. If we can define neighbor, than we can really make sure we know what we are doing with people.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary a neighbor is defined as, “one living or located near another.” For the dictionary a neighbor is all about location. We usually identify a neighbor as one who lives in the home next door. Can a neighbor be a neighbor without a home? We can love those around us for this definition.

Mr. Rogers asks to be our neighbor in the opening sequence of “Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood.” “Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won’t you be my neighbor?” Well, that seems like a choice to me. We could choose who to love.

But Jesus flips all definitions again. Jesus answers with a parable. If this parable were just a morality lesson, we would get rid of the Samaritan stuff. But the Samaritan stuff is there and so is the other stuff about other folks passing the guy in the ditch by. What this parable really does is tell us that anyone, everyone, any person, can be and is our neighbor. We don’t get to pick and choose. And by doing something in this scenario, the Samaritan has redefined that anyone in need is our neighbor. From the Samaritan’s point of view, the guy in the ditch becomes the neighbor.

What does this do for us today? It means that anyone in need or wandering is our neighbor. Those just outside of our doors transform what neighborhood does for us. Those without homes are not just neighbors but in our neighborhood and they don’t even need a home to become such. Every one of us is called to be neighbor. God resonates with the wandering, the homeless, and the marginalized. God is not confined to the home but bridges the gaps in the neighborhood. In return, we are called to co-mingle, to get our hands dirty, to check in and relate to our neighbor, with or without home.

Prayer: Lord, this age-old story is a shining example of the fact that our ‘neighbor’ has nothing to do with their location, but our proximity and ability to help. Make me a better neighbor, expanding my neighborhood to boundaries that stretch me personally as well. Amen

What Does Real Love Look Like?

Nicki Koziarz

Hebrews 6:10

"God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." (NIV)

She's a name-dropper. The kind of woman who always needs the world to know what famous person tweeted at her, liked her post or followed her on Instagram. She's always at the important meetings, the ones where the people in charge see her. And she schedules lunches and coffee dates with people who can take her career further.

We all know this woman. She's our neighbor. Our co-worker. Our ministry leader. She's everywhere. And maybe, at times, there's a little bit of this woman in each of us.

The world tells us in order to go higher we must surround ourselves with people who will take us higher. Our mommas taught us at a young age we will become like those we keep close. And in high school we grouped together with people who were like-minded.

While I understand the importance of keeping company with the right kind of people, I see Jesus taking a different approach at times as I study His life in the Bible.

It's true Jesus had good friends like His disciples, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But as I look closely at the steps of Jesus, I see He invested a lot of His time into the "least of these:" the poor, the hungry, the broken, the weak and the people who had absolutely nothing to offer Him.

Jesus always had a genuine concern and focus on people in need.

If we are always surrounding ourselves with the "best of these," how will we ever truly learn to love the least of these?

It's an honest question to reflect on as we go about our days, make our schedules and choose where to invest our energy. But I don't really know if in Jesus' eyes this concept of serving the least of these is **optional**.

God blesses us so that we may bless others. May we be compelled to take our eyes off ourselves and turn our heads to the right and to the left. Let us see those around us in need and give whatever we have to bless them.

Here are three ways to do this right now:

1. Spend time with someone who has nothing to give back to you.
2. Ask God if there's anything you have in your possession that could bless someone else.
3. Write a note of encouragement to someone who is down, sick or weary.

We don't always need to be with the "best of the best." There is life, love and opportunities to expand our souls if we will humble ourselves and become just a little bit more like Jesus today and serve the least of these.

God, help us to see those in need today. Help our lives ring loudly as we take steps to serve others more than ourselves. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Prayer: Lord, help me get outside my comfort zone and show me how to mingle with the "least of these," while continuing to walk with You as you give me others who are "the best of these."

HOPE

BY JOHN NUNES

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

As the late Luther Seminary professor, Gerhard Forde, once put it: “It is false optimism that brings ultimate despair.”

Life can collapse without warning. Disasters strike in our personal lives as well as on a global scale.

On a frigid evening, my then 15year old son ended up hospitalized after a basketball game. As I sat in the cold emergency room from 9:30 p.m. until 4:30 a.m., consoling him in his personal pain, reports of a catastrophe unfolded on the TV screen. Haiti, barely surviving in backbreaking poverty, had absorbed a 7.0 magnitude earthquake. On my much smaller telephone screen, email messages zipped around the world.

Regretfully, we must accept the inevitably of disaster and human suffering. Evil is as real as it is often unexplainable. Yet, we are never satisfied to stand by idly watching people die. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Deeply woven into the fiber of our tradition is the conviction that all people are made in the image of God. If we accept this, we cannot be content to see people hungry or suffering.”

PRAYER God of hope, who heard the cries of Israelites in Egypt, hear the cries of those who suffer in a broken world. Move in us to respond to those calls swiftly with grace and mercy. AMEN.

Just Hungry

Exodus 33:11

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.

I wholeheartedly believe in divine encounters. I had one this afternoon as I was at a stop light. There was a young man standing on the corner holding a sign that said, "Just Hungry". My heart ached. I almost never carry cash but today I had a little. I know people say never to give out cash to people on the street but I don't care. I wanted to treat that man with dignity and respect. I rolled down my window and he came over to my car. He was fully coherent. I didn't detect any alcohol and at that moment he definitely wasn't under the influence of any other drug. He was tall, had long dark hair, and a beard. He could have played a role as Jesus in a church Easter production. As he said "God bless you" his open mouth revealed missing teeth. I looked him in the eyes and said, "Do you know how much Jesus loves you?" He smiled and said, "Yes ma'am. With tears in my eyes I said "I'm so sorry you're in this situation but I know Jesus loves you." I asked him his name and told him mine. I said, "Bobby, I'm going to be praying for you." He thanked me several times and I said goodbye as the light changed to green. I have no idea why that young man is in that situation. A lot of people say they're just taking advantage, or that they're going to buy alcohol or drugs with the money. It's not for me to judge. It's for me to love and pray. I am praying for his salvation and for God to send other people across his path to minister to him. God has a destiny for Bobby.

We pass by people like Bobby all the time. They aren't holding the sign that says, "Just Hungry" but without Jesus they are desperately hungry. They are lost and on their way to an eternal hell. If you're like me you desire to please God, and to know Him more and more. Intimacy with God is found in fellowship with Him, worshiping Him, reading His Word and reaching out to His children. I pray that each one of us will take every divine encounter that comes our way. It's been almost 9 years since God spoke the following to me. As I was thinking about Bobby He brought it back to my remembrance. I may or may not see Bobby again on this side of eternity but I believe he will fulfill his God given destiny.

Prayer: Lord, speak to me through others so I can hear You as clearly as when you spoke to

Putting Poverty in Perspective

John 12:7-8

Jesus answered, "Don't stop her. It was right for her to save this perfume for today—the day for me to be prepared for burial. The poor people will always be with you. But you will not always have me." (ERV)

Scripture is clear: we are to help the poor, feed the hungry, and care for widows, orphans, and aliens among us. Yet there will always be a tug of war about our priorities in how to give—what do we give specifically and extravagantly to help the poor among us and what do we give to support other facets of the Lord's work. Each is important. Each can honor God. So let's not be critical of those who give extravagantly to any of God's work. God knows the heart of the giver and we need to rejoice in their generosity to honor him. Even more, we need to be generous with the Lord and those in need! After all, Jesus himself reminds us that when what we do to care for those less fortunate, we are actually doing it for him! (Matthew 25)

Prayer: Loving and gracious Father, mold my heart to be more like yours. Bless me with graciousness, generosity, thankfulness, and a forgiving spirit. Open my eyes to all that Jesus has done, is doing, and will do for me so that I will more freely share with others my love, possessions, money, and time. In Jesus' name, and because of Jesus' love, I pray. Amen. Moses, face to face.

Week 6 – Mar 21-25

As you finish up this Lenten season, and this devotional series, how has God spoken to you? What is He calling you to do? The series tried to touch on many aspects of compassion ministry. Our prayer team is praying for God's enlightenment to touch you fully.



Homeless, Not Abandoned

LuAnn Prater

Isaiah 61:1

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.” (NIV)

I got a text saying my sister was on the news in our home state. I raced to my computer to pull up the local station. As director of a home that houses young, troubled women, she was pleading that the homeless be counted in the 2010 Census.

It seemed like not too many years ago my sister and I could have ended up in that home. Our lives could have taken a “Mary turn.” I met Mary at a fundraising banquet for the Rescue Mission. She sat next to me and we immediately connected. Two years earlier she had stepped into the wrong car. A man took what he wanted from her, then left her for dead on the side of the road.

She’d already known a hard life. As a child she’d rebelled against her parents and run away. For 21 years she had lived on the streets. But then she went with a fellow homeless girl to the Rescue Mission. When they entered, she witnessed something that touched her deeply. The Mission folks embraced her friend and told her how much they had missed her and been praying for her safety. In 21 years no one had ever done that for Mary.

There was something different in this place. Mary physically healed there while Jesus ministered to her soul through the love of His servants. She discovered what it meant to be a child of the King and gave her heart to Him. She learned how to make wise choices, obey Mission rules, and become faithful to herself and to Jesus.

Mary now has two jobs, lives in her own apartment and serves at her church nearly every time the doors are open. She glows with God’s brilliant grace and looks like she just stepped out of a fashion magazine. Her smile lights up the room.

She said her momma never stopped praying for her. She now praises God for the years of heartache and hardships because they put her in touch with the Savior.

My parents, too, were on their knees for my sister and me many times. Maybe that person you see on the street has parents with calluses on their knees.

Watching my once wayward sister stand up for the homeless on TV that day made my heart smile. Our parents would be smiling too, for she displays the Lord’s splendor in the Rescue Mission.

Are you His witness? Go display His splendor today because I see His brilliant grace shining on you!

Prayer: Dear Lord, forgive me for walking right by the hurting without even noticing. Open my eyes to see the world through Your eyes. May I point a broken heart to the Great Healer. Amen.

Loving the Unlovely

Diane Markinshare

Proverbs 11:25

“A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

I just read ***Under the Overpass*** by Mike Yankoski, a true story of two college guys who wanted to experience life as homeless people. They spent months on the streets of cities like Denver, Washington D.C., Portland, San Francisco, San Diego and my hometown, *Phoenix*.

What they learned is that “street people” are at best invisible and at worst reviled. They attended church every Sunday and were not very warmly received in most because of how they looked and smelled. They were even thrown off the property of one church lawn in our own city.

Of Phoenix the author says, “We experienced big programs, big churches, and big talk, without much love in action, at least for two unappealing transients like us.”

I don’t think any of us sees ourselves as unloving or unwelcoming but I’m not sure how excited any of us would be if two dirty, foul-smelling men wanted to occupy the seat next to ours in church or at Sunday brunch. I’ll admit I’ve been the first one to beat a retreat on occasion.

We may judge them as being lazy or drug addicts and almost always try to escape before they ask us for something. Yankoski points out that the people he met on his “experiment” didn’t *suddenly* become homeless panhandlers. It happened slowly over time and was typically precipitated by events that damaged their lives horrifically.

The point I’m heading toward is that we need to remember the sacrifices Christ made and the attitudes he demonstrated. I’m not just talking about the Big One (His own terrible, painful death), but the time Jesus spent with the smelly, unappealing people He encountered every day. He talked with them, ate with them, touched them and genuinely cared for them and expects as much from us.

“I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” Matthew 25:45

Do we really want the reputation of *Big* programs but *Little* compassion? Whether it is someone who is malodorous or just has a stinky disposition, we need to walk toward them, take a moment to listen, encourage them and see how we can help meet an immediate need. A granola bar, a smile, a kind word or a listening ear may feel like the love of God to someone who isn’t used to being bestowed those gifts.

Prayer: Jesus, show people I meet that I am a Christian by my love. Make some changes in me so my alignment with You is more apparent. Amen

ABUNDANCE

BY DAN RUTH

Ezekiel 3:3

He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

Food is one of the most prominent metaphors throughout the Bible. Harvest, manna, honey, wine and wedding banquets: these things paint pictures throughout scripture of God's blessings. They are images that sustain the life of God's people and bring God's people together into abundant celebration of that life.

"You are what you eat" and eating is such an important piece of life that there's almost no more powerful metaphor in scripture. Ezekiel isn't just given a scroll to read, he is told to eat that word, to chew it, taste it and ingest it, so that God's word literally becomes part of him. Ezekiel does not become a prophet who merely speaks God's word; Ezekiel is sustained by God's word, and it is sweet as honey.

In other parts of Scripture, God's word isn't food, it's the other way around: food is God's Word. We repeat Jesus' words in worship and we consume that Word:

"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

People don't always have the food they need to sustain themselves or their families. Many people can't grow enough food on their own land; others don't even have the land they'd need to grow something; and still other people are surrounded by enough food, but for political or economic reasons can't access it. By helping people around the world access sustaining food, we both respond to and participate in God's word. God's promise to us is everlasting, sustaining life. May that promise fill our bodies, energizing and nourishing us to give thanks and to work to ensure that all people, in all places, are well fed.

PRAYER God of abundance, you give of yourself in the bread and wine that feeds us. Send us out in the world to share abundantly with those who have only known scarcity. In the name of Jesus, AMEN.

Feeling Violated

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”

I was in Milwaukee this past week for our District’s annual conference. Just prior to the end of the enriching, inspiring event, something happened...vandalism to several cars in the parking lot. Someone I spoke to commented that they felt violated (theirs was one of the cars with damage.) Others took it in stride praying their Bibles would impact the thieves, while still others are claiming they won’t go back.

I’ve spent some time thinking about that...our fear of those we are supposed to be ministering to. And the concept that we should always feel safe and secure and that bad things like this don’t happen to people is totally unfounded. But then we’re a denomination of rural churches who feel safe in their hometowns. Is it just our denomination though? Don’t most churches build in the outskirts?

When we live in the “civilized world,” we don’t always accept the fact that people live in the midst of drugs and crime every day. We don’t want to imagine the fact that people all over the world (including our country) live in fear of being robbed or violated in some other way. Yet the bulk of our population lives in cities where this is as common as our rural Master Gardeners Clubs.

As Christians, we are called to minister to the less fortunate...yet we remain in the comfort of our safe homes and neighborhoods. We send others, but justify not traveling to a church that might present danger to our material possessions. Isn’t the loss of our property worth a lost soul won for Jesus?

I know. I lived in Milwaukee...in fact only a few blocks from where the incident occurred. And trust me, this isn’t the worst part of town. I know what it’s like to hear gunshots two doors down at two in the morning. I know the fear of threats to kidnap your child because ‘red-heads bring the best price,’ long before “human trafficking” was a phrase. To those who are upset their cars were broken into, think about someone walking into your home while you are asleep and robbing you...twice in one week!

In hindsight, I see many times that the hand of God protected me and those entrusted to our care, like the Christian college students from out of town staying with us, who wandered off and got lost in the inner city. But like God was with Gideon when the numbers were against them, like he was with a young man sold into slavery by his brothers, like he was with a frightened ill-equipped man sent to make demands on Pharaoh, as He stood with three faithful men in a fiery furnace...He’s with us today. So if you walk in fear and feel violated when little things happen, pray for those around the world facing real violations, people who are truly helpless to protect themselves, people who don’t even dream of owning the many things we possess. Maybe you want to ask God to show you how to help them. But be careful...God may call you to personally “go” instead of just writing a check this time.

Prayer: Lord, remove my own fears that might be keeping me from doing your work. And we pray for those around the world who are in real danger of being violated. Protect them and give them the strength to face one more day. Amen

PROMISE

BY DAN RUTH

Hebrews 10:22

“Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

In biblical times, water was a mixed blessing, at best. Necessary for life, and often seen as a blessing, it was also associated with chaos and death.

The waters of the flood were both promise and destruction; the Red Sea was a symbol of both liberation and death.

In many of the communities of the world, water can also be a mixed blessing.

The water is swimming with life, but it is far from life-giving. Parasites, bacteria and other microorganisms lurk in the waters, causing a multitude of illnesses.

Children, whose bodies lack the resistance of their elders, are especially vulnerable.

For them, drinking this living water can be the beginning of a downward spiral that includes malnutrition, school absence and sometimes even death.

Yet, as people of faith, we know the powerful promise that God brings to water. And we know that water is essential to life. In the fourth chapter of John, Jesus met a woman at a well and asked her for a drink of water.

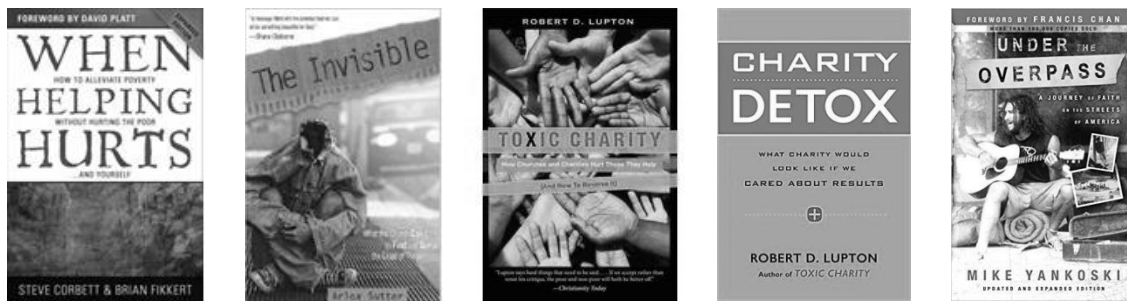
Jesus spoke to her heart, telling her that he could give her “living water, bubbling up to eternal life.” This living water that Jesus promised is alive not with microorganisms, but with God’s lasting promise.

In the waters of baptism, we are drowned in water and the word and reborn children of God. Here water brings death, but through that death, God grants us eternal life.

PRAYER: God of promise, you promised to be with your people through the waters of the Red Sea and with us in the waters of baptism. May your promise be known through the life-giving waters provided to communities where water has been dry, In Jesus' name, Amen.

Further Reading:

The world of missions has changed over the years as the world itself has changed. If you would like a list of books to broaden your vision, you may want to consider the following:



- When Helping Hurts – *How to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor or yourself* by Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert (thoughts on compassion ministry abroad and at home)
- The Invisible by Arloa Sutteer (discover who and where the least of these are)
- Toxic Charity – by Robert Lupton (how today’s charity actually hurts the ones it is intended to help)
- Charity Detox – by Robert Lupton (the sequel to Toxic Charity on how to fix the problem)
- Under the Overpass – *A Journey of Faith on the Streets of America* by Mike Yankoski (story of 2 college boys who chose to live homeless for 5 months)