

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.

Helping Hands Gospel Mission, Inc.
PO Box 1352
Wisconsin Rapids WI 54495-1352
www.HelpingHandsGospelMission.org

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

Copyright 2009 Amelia G. Sims

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