

DEVOTIONALS



To help you and your church build awareness and excitement for Change the Story, here are five devotionals prepared to stimulate reflection and discussion about God’s mandate to help those who are less fortunate.

The devotionals can be used in any order. Encourage your Bible study leaders and Sunday school teachers to use one or more of them as the date for Change the Story: The Compassion Experience approaches. Your pastor may even want to utilize some of these thoughts in sermons or in bulletin articles leading up to the event.

We know you’ll find other creative ways, too, to use these devotional ideas to prepare people’s hearts for Change the Story!

LEAVING A CORNER DEVOTIONAL 1



Read Leviticus 19:9-10 (NIV)

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.”

This law handed down to the ancient Israelites required that landowners leave any grain that dropped to the ground during harvest; they were forbidden to pick their fields clean. They were not allowed to even collect the stalks growing on the edges of their fields. The leftovers belonged to the poor, especially widows, orphans and needy foreigners. In this way, an agricultural society could provide a safety net for the poor. Because their land really belonged to God, the practice of gleaning served to remind landowners that they were stewards of God’s property, sharing with the less fortunate.

Questions for Thought or Discussion

1. *What practices today equate to “leaving a corner” for those who have financial needs?*
2. *In what way is this passage a reminder during times of economic stress about the One who really owns and provides all we have?*
3. *What are you doing to share with those who have less?*

EXTENDING CHRIST'S LOVE DEVOTIONAL 2



Read Job 29:12-16 (NIV)

*Because I rescued the poor who cried for help,
and the fatherless who had none to assist them.
The man who was dying blessed me;
I made the widow's heart sing.
I put on righteousness as my clothing;
justice was my robe and my turban.
I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.
I was a father to the needy;
I took up the case of the stranger.*

Job was the very definition of a righteous man. He commanded respect from the entire community, not just because of his wealth and power, but because he helped the powerless and needy.

Job's treatment of others is detailed in this passage. He was just and kind to the poor, orphans and widows, the disabled, strangers and victims. He was known for imitating God's truth, justice and love, and for trusting in His mercy.

In your own life, consider how you too might imitate God by extending Christlike love to those in need. In what way does trusting in God's mercy enable you to do that?

Continue by reading Job 31:16-23:

*If I have denied the desires of the poor
or let the eyes of the widow grow weary,
if I have kept my bread to myself,
not sharing it with the fatherless —
but from my youth I reared him as a father would,
and from my birth I guided the widow —
if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing,
or the needy without garments,
and their hearts did not bless me
for warming them with the fleece from my sheep,*

*if I have raised my hand against the fatherless,
knowing that I had influence in court,
then let my arm fall from the shoulder,
let it be broken off at the joint.
For I dreaded destruction from God,
and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things.*

Here Job defends himself against false accusations made by Eliaphaz (Job 22:7-9). Job holds himself up as a model of a righteous man, one who demonstrates concern for the poor and oppressed. He describes how he shared food with orphans and even took them into his home. He encouraged and counseled widows and gave clothes to those who lacked them. Job was just and charitable toward the needy because he stood in awe of the Lord.

In Old Testament days, a person's heart was made evident through his generous actions toward the powerless in society. While Christians today operate under grace through Jesus' sacrifice, our love for others still provides the watching world with evidence of a life-changing relationship with the Lord.

Questions for Thought or Discussion

1. *What evidence would others see in your own life of your devotion to God as it relates to helping others?*
2. *What changes do you want to make, or what goals do you want to set?*

RECOGNIZING THE LITTLE ONES

DEVOTIONAL 3



Read Matthew 18:2-10 [NIV]

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

“If anyone causes one of these little ones — those who believe in me — to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.”

Jesus reminds the disciples of the value the Lord places on “these little ones” — in other words, children. He next demonstrates the importance God attaches to little children by giving the disciples the illustration of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12-14. After describing a man who searches for one of his hundred sheep, Jesus asks, “Will he not leave them and search for the one until he finds it?” He points out that in the same way God is concerned about “these little ones” and does not want to lose any of them.

Questions for Thought or Discussion

1. *Why are children important to God?*
2. *What will happen to anyone who harms a child?*
3. *Why should we not look down on “these little ones”?*
4. *What threats do children face in our modern world?*
5. *How do you plan to value children in your life today?*

SHARING WHAT WE HAVE

DEVOTIONAL 4



Read 1 John 3:17-18 (NIV)

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

It's evident from these two short verses that the love of God is not just a sweet feeling or an abstract concept. The love of God shines through our actions and is reflected in our everyday deeds.

John's question couldn't be clearer: If a person has material goods, yet fails to take pity on a brother in need, how can the love of God be in him?

The unstated answer is clearer still: It can't.

This passage may prompt discomfort among those who have plenty but choose to harden their hearts and avoid thinking about those who have little. And it could prompt others who truly care about people in need to ask this additional question: Am I doing enough?

Let's pay attention to this truth so we can catch ourselves when we only talk about helping others instead of taking concrete action.

Questions for Thought or Discussion

1. *Have you ever found yourself loving with words but not actions?*
2. *What do you do when confronted with evidence of poverty or deprivation?*
3. *Do you ever ask yourself, "Am I doing enough?" What is your answer?*

PLEASING GOD

DEVOTIONAL 5



Read James 1:27 (NIV)

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Can you imagine standing before God and hearing Him say that your Christian walk is pure and faultless? What an amazing moment that would be!

If you are struggling with your faith, embrace this verse. It offers simple instructions on how we can please God.

In this passage God asks us to reach out to widows and orphans. Is there a widow in your church or neighborhood who needs someone to listen? Or maybe she needs some help around the house or a ride to the store. Is there an orphan who needs love or a home-cooked meal?

God has such a heart for the vulnerable and lonely. Pray that He will give you a heart for those in need, too.

Questions for Thought or Discussion

1. *What is one way you can reach out to a widow or orphan?*
2. *Are there other vulnerable and lonely people you could help?*
3. *Why is it important to move outside of your comfort zone to help another person?*
4. *Spend time in prayer for a pure heart and a clear vision to help others.*