

LOVING THE POOR

Five devotions to help you share God's love for the poor



1. OWNERSHIP



Read

To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Deuteronomy 10:14

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; 2 for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. Psalm 24:1-2

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Matthew 6:26



Consider

Even though some of these passages are poetic, it is clear that everything means every thing. Look around where you are. Name some items. They belong to God. And even things you cannot see - colours, sounds, ideas. Can you name something that is not his? It's impossible! And that means even things that have a person's name on it still belong to God.

God is a good and loving God. He cares for all that he has made. He is not distant nor indifferent to his creation. Even the smallest bird is in his reach. And if he cares for the birds, then how much more will he care for you!

It is freeing knowing that every thing ultimately belongs to God . It means we have a loving heavenly Father who gives us just what we need - our daily bread. And we can be generous with what he has entrusted to us, because he is faithful and the storehouse of his riches is immense. We only see glimpses of his riches in this life. In the new creation we will experience fully.



Question

1. How does it make you feel to know that everything you have is not actually yours, but belongs to God? Your money? Your time? Your life?
2. When are you most tempted to forget that God owns all things



Pray

Loving Father, you have made a wondrous world, and it all rightly belongs to you. May I be content with the daily bread you provide. As you have been generous to me, may I be generous to others, not clinging to things but to you. Amen.



2. POWER TO HELP



Read

- 1 Praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord, my soul.
- 2 I will praise the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
- 3 Do not put your trust in princes,
in human beings, who cannot save.
- 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the
ground; on that very day their plans come to
nothing.
- 5 Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God.
- 6 He is the Maker of heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them—
he remains faithful forever.
- 7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
- 8 the Lord gives sight to the blind,
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
the Lord loves the righteous.
- 9 The Lord watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
- 10 The Lord reigns forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord.

Psalm 146



Consider

Human history makes us rightfully nervous about one person having too much authority and power. But the Lord God has absolute authority over all that exists. How does he use that power? He uses it to help those that have no power and those who have great need.

This is at odds to how much of the world operates. When we are given more authority, more influence, we often see that as a benefit to ourselves, rather than a greater opportunity to serve others. We often have more power than we realise. And we should use that power in the service of others, for that is how God uses his power.

The ability to pay for coffee or clothes is a form of power, but it does not give us reason to demean the retail worker or waiter serving us. We may have physical strength, but we should use these muscles to help and not hurt those who are weaker. We may have a position of authority over others, in the workplace or through experience or social dynamics. Let us use that authority to help those in our care.



Question

1. Why does God have a heart for those who are weak, or in need?
2. What power do you have? How can you use that power to serve those around you?



Pray

Gentle Father, you have great power, beyond what I can imagine. Thank you that you use your power to care for those who are in great need. Please give me an understanding of the power you have given me, and the will to use that power in the service of others. For the sake of Jesus I pray this. Amen.



3. HELP FOR THE POOR



Read

19 When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 21 When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. Deuteronomy 24:19-21

- 4 Sing to God, sing in praise of his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before him—his name is the Lord.
- 5 A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.
- 6 God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. Psalm 68:4-6



Consider

Poverty is more than just a lack of money. In the Old Testament, the poor are those who are disconnected from community and the land, typified by the people like the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. What these people lack is not just money or possessions, but key relationships. So the Bible gives solutions to poverty in relational terms through which blessings are received – the lonely have a family, the widow has a defender, the foreigner has access to the land.

In areas where whole communities are living in desperate poverty, the Christian community can be a powerful agent of change. Armed with the gospel of Jesus, bound together with bonds of loving fellowship, and backed by the generous resourcing and prayerful support of brothers and sisters from far away, the local church can truly love the poor in every sense – materially, relationally, spiritually. This holistic care reflects what God has done for his people.



Question

1. A recognition of our spiritual poverty before God is necessary to accept the saving help he provides through Jesus. Take a moment to reflect on the relational aspects of material poverty to better understand our spiritual poverty.
2. Consider some people you know who may have enough financially, but are poor relationally. What does loving the poor look like for them?



Pray

Creator God, you have made humanity to live in relationship with you and with each other. Thank you for the opportunities you have given your people to love their neighbours. Please continue to equip and strengthen the body of Christ to play their part in loving the poor. Help me to see the full extent of poverty around me, and equip me to love others deeply. Amen.



4. LOVE IN ACTION



Read

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3:16-18



Consider

We've all, at times, said we will do something, but have not carried through on our promise. It may have been because something hindered us, or that we never intended to carry through on our words. Maybe it was because of simple forgetfulness. Whatever the reason, our words and actions did not line up.

Jesus showed his love for us by the ultimate sacrificial action: dying for us on the cross. As his followers, we must love people with not just words, but action. For what good is saying you love someone if you do not show it in action?

Love must be practical. It must consider the whole person and their context. It is driven by a real concern for the person in their need. And it will involve some level of sacrifice. It will cost us something, often our most precious resource – our time.



Question

1. What is our primary motivation for loving others? Is it yours?
2. There are many opportunities where we can love people in need with action, whether it's someone in poverty overseas, someone needing help in our church, a family member or close friend, or simply someone we meet in the street. Why might we be reluctant to love people in practical ways?



Pray

Lord Jesus, you laid down your life for me. Grant me a greater understanding of your love for me, so that I can show greater love for my neighbour. Help me to love others with actions and in truth, considering their situation and needs. Not for me, but for the glory of Jesus throughout all the earth, I ask this.

Amen.



5. LOVE'S REWARD



Read

27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6:27-36



Consider

We all want that warm feeling inside that comes with helping someone in need, and to hear from them how much they appreciate us. But real life isn't always like this. The people we are to help are sometimes our enemies, who hate us and mistreat us. Even after showing them love, they won't always be appreciative of our sacrifice.

But we don't love them for the warm fuzzies, or to be rewarded by them. This is not how God loved us. Instead, we should be content with loving people, simply knowing that we are seen by our Father, who loved us first.

There are two good strategies for growing in love for difficult people. First, consider Jesus, who laid down his life for you, his enemy. Second, pray for the difficult person.



Question

1. Who do you find it hard to love?
2. How does considering God's love for you help you love these people?



Pray

Loving heavenly Father, you have shown great love to me, even when I was your enemy. And your love for me is steadfast. Give me strength to love my enemies and those who hate me. Remind me of your constant presence, and the reward you have stored for me and all your children.
Amen.