

## 10-DAY POVERTY DEVOTIONAL



### **Helping Without Hurting: The Bible and the Poor**

The Bible is full of commands to care for the poor and the oppressed. In ten days, explore the depth of God's concern for the poor, and what it might look like for you to answer that call in your own life. Each day includes a real-life story or anecdote, Scripture and meditation, challenge, and prayer drawn from Scripture. The content of these devotions is inspired by or derived from *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*, by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. We would like to thank The Chalmers Center for providing this plan. For more information about Chalmers and effective poverty alleviation, please visit [www.chalmers.org](http://www.chalmers.org).

## Day 1

### Devotional: **In Word and Deed**

*Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:18)*

**Statistics.** Love is tangible. It can be seen and felt. Poverty is also tangible. It can be seen and felt all over the world. In the Western world, poverty is sometimes confined to particular areas of cities or rural counties. But in much of the world, material poverty is more broadly evident. Children are orphaned by war, aids, and disease. Families lack clean water and food. Schools lack books and desks. And communities are gripped by fatalism bred on hopelessness. While the average American lives on more than \$90/day, approximately one billion people live on less than \$1/day, and 2.6 billion—40% of the world's population—live on less than \$2/day. What do we do with such information?

**Call.** To those overwhelmed by the command to serve the poor, Jesus speaks tenderly, though emphatically: "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." He says that when we see and help the poor, we bear witness to His love within us. Statistics and abstract talk of "the poor" must lead us to action in a particular time, place, and situation. As author [Frederick Buechner](#) said: "Jesus is apt to come, into the very midst of life at its most real and inescapable. Not in a blaze of unearthly light, not in the midst of a sermon, not in the throes of some kind of religious daydream, but. . . at supper time, or walking along a road." Jesus calls us to open our hearts and lay down our lives for the poor, the very particular poor, the ones walking along the road to Kigali or sharing a meal in a homeless shelter, the very ones in front of us.

**Charge.** Though the scale of poverty is immense, you are called to engage in God's work of serving the poor and the oppressed. Recognize God's provision in your life and ask Him to reveal how He would have you steward your resources (time, talent, and treasure) on behalf of the materially poor. Ask Him to reveal ways you can take action in your own community and to grant you wisdom as you do so. To see the poor is the beginning of a response. Watch and pray.

*Father, thank You for your abundant provision for all our needs. Help us, out of our abundance, know how to wisely respond to the poor among us. Fill our hearts with compassion, that we may love those whom You love and testify to Your work in our hearts and in the world. Let us love in word and deed.*

### Reading: 1 John 3:11-24

11For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. 13Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. 14We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. 16This 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. 17If 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? 18Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 19This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. 23And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 24The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

## Day 2

*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Gen. 3:6)*

### Devotional: **A Four-Fold Poverty**

**Brokenness.** Mary lives in a slum in Kenya. She suffers from regular abuse by her husband and lives in a culture where she is treated as inferior because she is a woman. She seeks to start a business selling charcoal, but lacks capital. Unable to secure a regular loan, she deals with the local loan shark, who exacts a punishing interest rate of 300 percent on her \$25 loan. Lacking business savvy, she enters a market flooded with charcoal sellers. Frustrated by a lack of profit, she seeks help from the local witch doctor who tells her of angry ancestral spirits that may only be appeased by the sacrifice of an expensive goat.

**Poverty.** When we hear Mary's story, we recognize there are complex factors contributing to her poverty. Like all human beings, Mary is made in God's image, a foundational fact of creation that means she was intended to reflect the Triune God in her relationships with God, self, others, and the rest of creation. Yet she suffers from broken relationships. She experiences poverty of community in the form of abuse and exploitation. She lacks spiritual intimacy with God, looking to false gods to change her circumstances. Her broken relationship with self takes the form of crippling insecurity and shame. And she experiences brokenness in her relationship with the rest of creation as she cannot find a stable source of work and income. Mary's lack of material goods flows from the complexity of these foundational relationships.

**Healing.** Mary's not the only one with broken relationships. If we want to be a part of God's work of healing these foundational relationships among the poor, we must recognize our own brokenness. Despite our relative material wealth, we suffer from broken relationships with God, self, others, and the rest of creation. The Fall really happened. Our brokenness is real. Recognizing it leads to healing for us and frees us to be used by God to point others to His reconciling work. *Lord, we recognize that we are broken, that our estrangement from You has had negative consequences in our relationships with others, distorted images of ourselves, and poor stewardship of Your good creation. Heal us and use us as healing agents among the poor.*

### Reading: Genesis 3:1-22

1Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" 4"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" 10He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." 11And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" 12The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." 13Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 14So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, 'Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. 15And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'" 16To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." 17To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. 18It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.'" 20Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. 21The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. 22And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

### Day 3

#### Devotional: **Why Jesus Came**

*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:19-20)*

**Piety.** In his book *The Last Days: A Son's Story of Sin and Segregation at the Dawn of the New South*, Charles Marsh describes growing up as the son of a pastor in Laurel, Mississippi, during the 1960s. Racial tensions and oppression were acute, with lynchings and cross-burnings in the news. Reverend Marsh faithfully proclaimed the gospel. Yet while he loathed the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, he did not regard the work of the Lord as including pronouncements on racial injustice and violence. Marsh said these were political matters “having little or nothing to do with the spiritual geography of a pilgrim’s journey to paradise.” But this is a hollow, half-version of the gospel.

**Kingdom.** The gospel is not good news of personal salvation and a call to individual piety or holiness. It is a proclamation and call to demonstrate God’s kingdom work to the world. Jesus came to “reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” His business is in undoing the effects of sin, “as far as the curse is found.” Sin brought about separation between God and man, but also broke people’s relationships with each other, themselves, and the creation itself. Christ came to heal the spiritual, social, physical, and psychological fallout from sin. While the full benefits of the kingdom are only for those who believe, His work impacts all aspects of His creation.

**Reconciliation.** If the mission of Jesus was to preach the good news of the Kingdom in word and deed, then so too is our mission. God calls us to be ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:20), preaching the gospel in both word and deed. We are called to bring Christ’s reconciling work to bear on *all* the effects of sin on individuals and social systems. We seek a Christ-centered, fully orbited, kingdom perspective on what poverty alleviation entails.

*Jesus, give us your Kingdom vision for both our lives and those of the materially poor. Let us see the deep effects of sin on the whole person and community, and then be ambassadors of Your reconciling work.*

#### Reading: Colossians 1:15-23

15The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. 21Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— 23if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

## Day 4

### Devotional: **Looking Intently**

*And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." (Acts 3:4)*

**Needs.** Not one of us is far from someone who is poor. Perhaps you stopped at a traffic light only to see a man with a hand-printed cardboard sign: "Need Help." Though you had reservations, you cracked the window and thrust a few dollars in his welcoming hand. The light changes. You drive on. The questions linger. Or maybe it is an email from Grace, an African woman you met on a short-term mission trip. She needs medical attention. Can you wire funds? The next morning, with a few clicks on a Money-gram web page, you send \$50, a small amount for you, but a fortune for Grace. You go to work with your conscience eased.

**See.** On entering the temple, Peter and John passed by a lame man placed at the entrance by his friends to beg for money. Many people averted their gaze, passing by. Others guiltily gave a few coins as commended by Jewish law. But Peter and John did something different. Peter "directed his gaze at him," or, as another translation says, "looked intently at him." The sense of the language suggests that the apostles, by looking intently, understood the man's deeper need for healing and recognized his dignity as a person. When Peter commanded him to "rise up and walk," the man jumped up to a new life of both spiritual and physical wholeness.

**Go Deep.** When you are confronted by the spoken or apparent need of someone who is poor, stop and look. Seek to understand the person's context and story, recognizing not just the apparent needs, but also the person's potential and dignity as someone who bears the image of God. Pray. Consider how you—or local churches and ministries—might be able to develop a long-term relationship with this person, pointing him or her to Christ's reconciling work and creating a context where lasting change can happen.

*Father, when I encounter people who are poor, give me patience and understanding as to how I can affirm their dignity and support real change in their lives. Forgive me when I have either ignored the needs around me or acted merely to ease my conscience. Give me wisdom to discern the most helpful response.*

### Reading: Acts 3:1-10

1One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. 2Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" 5So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 9When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

## Day 5

### Devotional: **Coming Attraction**

*If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. (Isa. 58:10)*

**History.** History testifies to God's concern for the poor and His people's faithfulness to model that love and concern. Sociologist [Rodney Stark](#) documents how the church's early interaction with and service to suffering people was crucial to its explosive growth. When plague swept through Rome, the residents who could afford it left, leaving behind those too poor and sick to leave. Christians remained to care for the sick and bury the dying. Christians have historically been at the forefront of loving and serving the poor and oppressed.

**Preview.** When you go to the movies, the screen opens with a succession of clips—sneak previews for coming attractions—that provide a glimpse of the full-length movie to come. The stories, poetry, and prophecies found in the Old Testament point to the coming One who would bring healing and justice for the hungry, homeless, and sick. It is not surprising that God put into the DNA of the people of Israel laws about guaranteeing rest for slave and alien, providing debt relief, setting slaves free - all with the goal of protecting the poor among His people. Walking as His people included sharing bread with the hungry, sheltering the poor, and clothing the naked (Isa. 58:10), and the early church continued that mission. Likewise, the church today is called to model the restoration that Christ has begun and that He will ultimately complete when He returns.

**Feature.** Michelle lives in a moderate sized US city. A few years ago, she found herself unemployed and homeless. She asked a local church for assistance, and they welcomed her warmly. Church deacons assisted her and invited her to join them at a [financial education class](#) designed for low-income people. She attended the class, learned about Jesus' reconciling work, developed relationships with church members, and then started attending church herself. She is now employed, in a stable housing situation, and helping other low-income people who come to the church for help. Michelle and her church are providing glimpses of Christ's social, physical, and spiritual restoration. How is your church and your life pointing others to the God who is making all things new?

*Father, thank You for the privilege of being part of Your work in the world, providing glimpses of the full restoration You will bring. Let our words, actions, and attitudes drive others to that hope and calling.*

### Reading: Isaiah 58:1-10

1"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. 2For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 3'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' 4Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 5Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. 6Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? 7Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 8Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 9Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 10Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.



## Day 6

### Devotional: **Worldview Matters**

*We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ . . . (2 Cor. 10:5)*

**Importance.** How we think matters. Consider Rwanda. Despite the fact that 80 percent of Rwandans claimed to be Christians, a civil war erupted in 1994 in which the Hutu majority conducted a brutal genocide against the Tutsi minority and Hutu moderates. An estimated 800,000 people were slaughtered, many by their own neighbors, and an already materially poor nation erupted into anarchy and violence. Lacking a deeply Christian worldview rooted in the dignity of every human as an image-bearer of God, Christians in Rwanda were swept into tragedy and violence.

**Implications.** [James Sire](#) defines a worldview as “a set of presuppositions which we hold about the basic makeup of our world.” Rwandan Christians held a deficient worldview, a privatized Christianity that failed to reach deep and wide into longstanding tribal divisions and hatred. Having a deficient Christian worldview, they failed to recognize the implications of Scripture and the gospel on their lives. And yet they are not alone. Many in the church, regardless of income or education level, fail to grasp and live out the far-reaching claims of the Bible on how we are to think and act. Faith is locked in a cage of Sunday worship and personal piety. We must let it out to do its work. We must “take every thought captive to obey Christ,” unpacking the implications of the gospel for every area of our lives.

**Invitation.** [Emmanuel](#) trains churches in Rwanda to form savings group ministries as a discipleship tool. In these groups, community members study Scripture, pray together, and save and lend their money, experiencing spiritual, social, and financial transformation. These groups are reaching deep into people’s worldviews, bringing Christ’s healing power to bear on the divisions that led to the genocide. “Savings groups are often where people give and receive forgiveness,” explains Emmanuel. And many of the groups, which are full of people who lost loved ones in the genocide, are now caring for the families of people imprisoned for crimes during the genocide. The power of the gospel is changing their worldview, leading to restoration in their relationships. Today, we need the Bible to renew our minds and equip us to embody the gospel in our lives.

*Father, forgive us for our often superficial worldview, for failing to see and act on the implications of a Kingdom perspective. Give us the mind of Christ to view others as You do, act in accordance to Your Word, and pursue justice for those around us.*

### Reading: 2 Corinthians 10:1-15

1By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away! 2I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. 3For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 6And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. 7You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do. 8So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. 9I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. 10For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” 11Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. 12We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. 13We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you. 14We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. 15Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand,

## Day 7

Devotional: **No Little People**

*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. (1 Cor. 1:27)*

**Surprise.** Edi is a widow in Togo, West Africa who owns a hairdressing business. Looking at her life, it would be tempting to see only the difficult circumstances she has endured. But as soon as she opens her mouth, you realize that Edi is anything but desperate. She has formed small group ministries with over one hundred young women in her community where they pray, study Scripture, and save their own money. These young women are extremely susceptible to human trafficking because of their social and economic vulnerability. But that is changing because of Edi's work. The women are learning how to support themselves, and Edi has led almost all of the women to Christ.

**Paradox.** In [\*No Little People\*](#) the late author Francis Schaeffer draws our attention to the paradox of our place in the world: "The Scripture teaches that much can come from little if the little is truly consecrated to God. There are no little people and no big people in the true spiritual sense, but only consecrated and unconsecrated people. . . . Those who think of themselves as little people in little places, if committed to Christ and living under His Lordship in the whole of life, may, by God's grace, change the flow of our generation." God takes what is weak and foolish in the world to shame the wise, "even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. . ." (1 Cor. 1:28). This upside-down way of working is the antidote to human boasting.

**Glory.** God is working through the materially poor like Edi. The point is simply that, for His own glory, God has chosen to reveal His kingdom in the places where the world, in all of its pride, would least expect it: among those the world calls foolish, weak, lowly, and despised. And while not all of us experience material poverty, we are all dependent on Christ's redeeming work. He is at work in all of our lives, glorifying Himself through our weakness.

*Father, we are weak, but You are strong. As we see the needs around us, encourage our hearts and show us what we have to offer—and show us the gifts You have given the materially poor. Use our offerings of money, time, and abilities to your ends and for Your glory.*

## **Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

18For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. 26Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29so that no one may boast before him. 30It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."



## Day 8

### Devotional: **Treasure**

*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor. 12:9)*

**Overwhelmed.** Once you begin to think about the reality of poverty, there is a danger of being overcome by the seemingly insurmountable needs around you. You don't know where to begin, how to address the root causes of problems, how to make a difference. You feel small and weak. And yet you know that the call of Scripture to serve and seek justice for the materially poor is clear.

**Grace.** The good news is that we do not have to be adequate. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul hears the Lord telling him "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Elsewhere we are reminded that we have this treasure—that is, life in Christ—in clay pots, not in fine jars, to remind us that it is the all-surpassing power of God that lives in us, that we can boast only in Christ and not ourselves. There is great comfort in knowing that weakness is no liability, that God will work out His will in us quite apart from us and yet in part through us. Just as God is at work in the lives and communities of people who are poor, He is at work in our broken lives. Grace abounds in apparent weakness.

**Begin.** When facing the enormity of material poverty, begin in your own weakness. Confess your own inadequacy and brokenness—your lack of wisdom, resources, and skills—and yet acknowledge the power of God to use finite people. Also pray for humility to recognize how the materially poor, those the world would call "weak," are being used mightily by God in their own communities. Pray for wisdom to know where to begin and what to do as you walk alongside the materially poor, relying on Christ's reconciling work to heal the brokenness in both of you. Offer your weakness in humility, and watch God work through your faithful obedience.

*Jesus, I know I am poor in spirit. Give me eyes to see Your glory among both the spiritually and materially poor, and give me perseverance as I seek to love the materially poor in both word and deed.*

### Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

1I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. 3And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— 4was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. 5I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. 6Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

## Day 9

### Devotional: **Our Neighbors**

*But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29)*

**Invisible.** Johnny Price is 44-years old and is struggling to raise two kids alone while being unemployed. Jodi earns \$6.25 per hour and depends on a food pantry for survival. Rosa lives in an unheated garage and says half the people in her church are in a similar situation. Juanita, a recent immigrant, works 70 hours a week as a domestic servant at wages that amount to \$4.03 per hour. None of these individuals live in low-income inner city neighborhoods or Majority World villages. They live in suburban America. And yet they often feel invisible. A lawyer, seeking to put Jesus to the test, asked how to inherit eternal life. He knew the answer: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Yet the lawyer pressed on and "desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" In response, Jesus told a story of a Samaritan who came upon a robbed and badly beaten man lying on the side of the road. A stranger, he bound his wounds and carried him to an inn where he cared for him. Interrupted. Inconvenienced. The Good Samaritan looked with compassion on the one in front of him, his neighbor, and met his need.

**Proximity.** The poor aren't just "out there" but are right among us, if only we look. The suburban poor live in older apartment complexes, pocket communities of mobile homes, and small enclaves of modest single-family houses in the shadow of 5000 square foot homes. Our neighbor is not just the orphan in Ethiopia who we can support monetarily and write a letter to now and then, but also the single immigrant mother struggling to survive in a forgotten apartment complex near our home. Are we willing to be interrupted and inconvenienced? Will we be neighbors to the people who can complicate our day-to-day lives? Look around. Jesus says, "You go, and do likewise."

*Jesus, open our eyes. Show us our neighbors. Give us compassion and a willingness to be interrupted and inconvenienced by the materially poor among us.*

### Reading: Luke 10:25-37

25On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26"**What is written in the Law?**" he replied. "**How do you read it?**" 27He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "**You have answered correctly,**" Jesus replied. "**Do this and you will live.**" 29But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30In reply Jesus said: "**A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.** 31**A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.** 32**So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.** 33**But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.** 34**He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.** 35**The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'** 36"**Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?**" 37The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "**Go and do likewise.**"

## Day 10

### Devotional: **A Final Apologetic**

*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. (Phil. 3:13-14)*

**Regret.** By now your eyes should be open to the materially poor. People in your own city struggle to pay bills, feed families, and obtain good health care. Miles away, you know that millions of orphans are without food, shelter, and education, living in the bush or in the streets. You may feel regret—for blindness to your neighbor, feelings of spiritual and intellectual superiority, and your own materialism. At the end of regret, you may be tempted to despair, to say amidst a torrent of brokenness, “What difference can I make?”

**Repentance.** In the end, repentance and action, not regret and paralysis, is what God calls us to embrace. We are not to wallow in the past, but rather to turn from sin and passivity to hope and love. Concerning his own growth in Christ, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead, to press on. In our turning toward hope and love, there is work to be done, and yet “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). God is at work in renovating our hearts, and we are called to be active participants in that change.

**Love.** Francis Schaeffer, who founded an apologetics ministry called L’Abri, so often said that love between Christians was “the final apologetic.” Moving beyond regret and repentance, it is our love for the materially poor that makes the truth of the gospel seem credible to the watching world. As Brian Fikkert says: “We are to embody Jesus by doing what He did and what He continues to do through us: declare—using both words and deeds—that Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who is bringing in a kingdom of righteousness, justice and peace. And the church needs to do this where Jesus did it, among the blind, the lame, the sick and outcast, and the poor.” So, Christian, press on. There is work to be done.

*King Jesus, we repent. Let us not live in regret but in hope and love. Help us to embody Jesus among the poor.*

### Reading: Philippians 3

#### **No Confidence in the Flesh**

1Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— 4though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

7But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

12Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

#### **Following Paul’s Example**

15All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.