

# LEFT BEHIND: A MISSION TRIP DEVOTIONAL PLAN FOR FAMILIES & FRIENDS

A 7-DAY DEVOTIONAL READING AND PRAYER GUIDE CREATED TO SUPPORT THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF LOVED ONES ANSWERING GOD'S CALL OF DISCIPLESHIP



# LEFT BEHIND: FOR FAMILIES & FRIENDS OF THOSE ON A MISSION TRIP

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DEVOTIONS BASED ON *GOD'S JUSTICE: THE HOLY BIBLE*



BY TIM STAFFORD, *GENERAL EDITOR*



So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

<sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

– Genesis 1:27-31

Today we begin a 7-day series of devotions for the families and friends of those who go on a mission trip. It uses some of the same Bible passages presented in “Devotions for a Mission Trip,” which your loved one or friend may have used in preparing to go.

Mission trips can be very challenging, but so can the feelings of being on the supportive end, “left behind” to worry and pray and wish for more news. This series of devotions aims to focus your thinking away from anxiety or uncertainty, and toward the confidence and assurance you can gain from God’s perspective.

Beginning in Genesis we will follow through Scripture seeking to peek at God’s plan for the world he made. The mission your family member or friend is on—and your mission at home—is to be a part of that.

What does the Bible say about what God wants? What does he love?

The first two chapters of Genesis describe God’s making of the heavens and the earth. They offer a breathtaking picture of complexity and beauty, one that God could describe in its totality as “very good.” (1:31)

Here’s another way to describe it: it was a *just* world. There was nothing in it that was unsettled or unfair. Every creature was provided for. They had plenty to eat. There was a settled order on the earth, in which humankind’s natural power of planning was used for good. Just as a good king would rule benevolently in his realm, so humanity would rule peacefully and benevolently on the earth. They would, as God intended, mirror God in the universe. (That is what an image does—it offers a picture of the one it



images. And God made us male and female to be image bearers of himself.)

Today we encounter a world that doesn't look this way. Your partners on the mission trip may find people who do not get enough food or other provisions they need for life. They may find animals and plants that cannot flourish because their environment does not provide for them. They may find people who do not mirror God in their behavior, who make a horrible caricature of what it means to rule benevolently in their environment.

Truthfully, you don't have to go on a mission trip to see such discrepancies. Injustice may be more subtle at home, but it's there.

You can gain a great deal by holding up the state of the world to the first chapters of Genesis. Is this what God intended? Is this what God lovingly created? If not, how can we participate in making it right? That is what we call *doing justice*. When we say that our Lord is a God of justice, we mean that he is engaged in making the world right, spiritually, physically and socially. That is what *mission* does.

**PRAYER** *Father, just as you made a just and beautiful world, help us to participate with you in making a broken world right. Show us just one small piece of the whole that we can help to set on a course to please you.*

— NOTES —



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**7** The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. <sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. <sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

– Exodus 3:7-10

This brief passage from Exodus emphasizes some very important characteristics of God. He is a God who *sees misery*. He is a God who *hears cries* from the slaves. He is a God who *is concerned*. He is a God who *rescues* and a God who *liberates* and a God who *provides abundant opportunity*.

Your friends on a mission trip may also *see misery*. They may *hear cries*. They may *feel concern*. Will they also experience rescue and liberation and abundant opportunity?

You may not know any slaves—though some say that there are more slaves today than at any time in the ancient world. Surely, however, you encounter people who are in misery, and people who cry, and people who suffer. Will you be like your heavenly Father, to see what is happening, to hear cries from the oppressed, to show concern, and even to rescue and provide? These are heavy burdens for anyone to carry, and God does not ever ask you to carry them alone. No, he asks you to join him as he leads the way.

It is important to note that God chose to liberate the Israelite slaves through a human being. He called Moses to help set his people free. Perhaps you, too, may be so called. Perhaps your friend or family member on the mission trip may experience a call like Moses’. It’s not unusual. God still sees and cares. God still calls.

**PRAYER** *Lord, help me to see and hear and show concern. Call me, as you like, to join you in liberating people. Call me, as you like, to help provide for their needs. Help me to be open and encouraging to loved ones and friends who experience such callings.*

— NOTES —

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The Mighty One, God, the LORD,  
speaks and summons the earth  
from the rising of the sun to where it sets.

<sup>2</sup> From Zion, perfect in beauty,  
God shines forth.

<sup>3</sup> Our God comes  
and will not be silent;  
a fire devours before him,  
and around him a tempest rages.

<sup>4</sup> He summons the heavens above,  
and the earth, that he may judge his people:

<sup>5</sup> “Gather to me this consecrated people,  
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”

<sup>6</sup> And the heavens proclaim his righteousness,  
for he is a God of justice.

– Psalm 50:1-6

Psalm 50 emphasizes God’s majesty and power, before which everybody must stand in awe. There is nothing cozy about the God of Psalm 50. “He is a God of justice,” as verse 6 emphasizes, and that means that he has strong views on what is supposed to happen on planet earth. No one can contradict this magnificent God.

Two things this psalm can teach you about mission:

First, the God who sends people on mission is the Lord of the whole earth—from the “rising of the sun to where it sets.” He “summons the heavens above, and the earth.” There is no corner of the earth, no place in the heavens, where he does not adamantly declare, “This is mine!” Your loved ones and friends who have gone on a mission trip need to be polite, humble and sensitive as they encounter people who are very different—who may worship a different god, or who hold to a completely different set of values. But they must never forget that they represent a God who made the heavens and the earth out of nothing, and who deserves complete and absolute reverence. You too! Don’t let your God be too small!







He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly[a] with your God.

– Micah 6:8

The prophet Micah expressed God's deep frustration with his people. Micah's book offers a searing condemnation of the nation of Israel, beginning with its leaders—its religious leaders, its governmental leaders, its judges. Together they had become vicious predators. They cared only for their own welfare.

It is a crying shame how far God's people have fallen. They were meant to flourish, showing the world what a life of justice can be. God intended this people to lead the way in setting his broken world right. Instead, they are leading the way in greed and callous carelessness. It should not be so! It breaks God's heart!

So what can be done? How should anybody respond to this? Should they make an extravagant, tearful dedication, sacrificing money and even children on God's altar?

No, says Micah. God has shown you what he wants. It is not extravagant or grandiose. It is simple. You should practice justice. You should love mercy. And you should walk with God humbly, recognizing just how small and fallen you are.

For those who go on mission trips, and for those who support them at home, God is not seeking grandiose sacrifices or extraordinary gestures. He wants simple things. Daily he wants to see you behaving in a just manner—that is, in a way that honors God's law to love your neighbor as yourself. God wants you to love mercy. Unlike the prophet Jonah, who could not forgive, you are to see mercy as the most beautiful set of clothes you can wear. And finally, God wants to see you turn to him—not showing off how great you are, but recognizing your own weaknesses and failings while keeping your hand tightly in God's hand.

**PRAYER** *Lord, help me to see myself the way you see me. Help me never to despair at my weaknesses, but to love the things you love and do the things you do.*



Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.  
<sup>2</sup> He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought.  
<sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’  
<sup>4</sup> “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”  
<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

– Luke 18:1-8

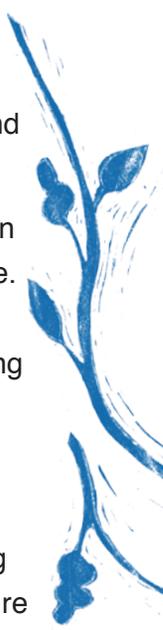
We’ve emphasized the story of God’s justice in this series of devotions. Justice is not a subject that is sprinkled on occasionally throughout the Bible, like confetti. Rather it is the core of what God seeks on the earth that he created. He aims to set right the world that has been broken by sin. He wants every creature to flourish, and he wants to put an end to evil. Then there will be peace. So God wants, and so he promises to do.

In mission we seek to take part in this story—to do what we can, by word and deed, to advance the coming of God’s kingdom and make this planet more what he intends. As Jesus’ parable of the persistent widow makes clear, even the most helpless person can participate in this—by prayer. God wants to bring justice, and he is eager to hear his people requesting it. But “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Will Jesus discover us praying with heart and soul for his kingdom to come?

What about you? Can you say that justice is consistently your prayer? Do you persist in looking for it and asking for it from God himself?

Mission trips can be a time to develop the habit—the faith habit—of praying for justice. Those who go on a trip will be highly attuned to their environment, noticing what they might ordinarily miss in everyday life. They may see more critically when they are in another cultural setting, recognizing injustice because it stands out. When your loved one or friend returns from their mission trip, they may tell you of challenging realities they observed.

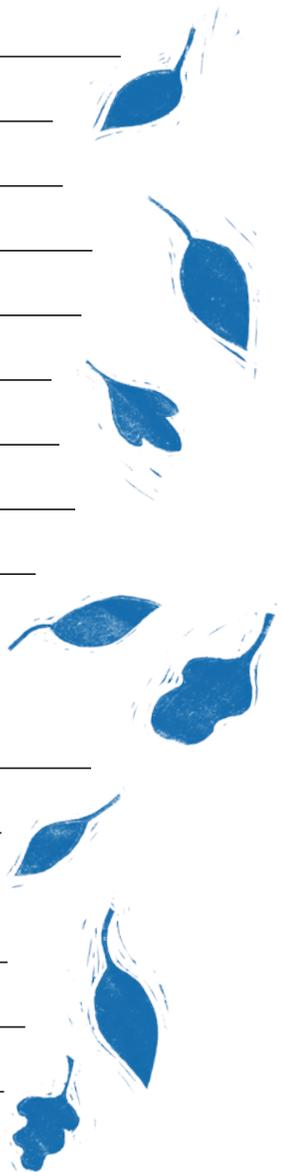
The main thing isn’t just to see injustice, but to respond. Jesus wants us to learn to pray. Truthfully, outrage may not accomplish much. Neither may plans for action. But whoever goes on mission—and whoever supports mission from home—is accompanied by a God who cares. He has the power to bring change. He has promised to bring change. He wants us to join him in his concern for injustice. Make sure you are talking to him about it.



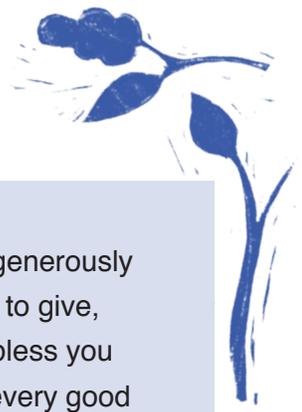
(Devotion continued)

**PRAYER** *Lord, I don't want to be a prayerless activist. I want to be more like this widow, who never lost hope, and never stopped praying.*

— NOTES —



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Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. <sup>7</sup> Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”[a]

<sup>10</sup> Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

– 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

The apostle Paul believed in a generous lifestyle, and he tried hard to teach it to those he had won to Christ. One way he did so was to sponsor a collection for the poor in Jerusalem. In many of his letters he advances this collection, but never at more length than in 2 Corinthians, where he lays out much of his thinking about generosity.

Remember where we started in this devotional series? In the first chapters of Genesis we get a picture of the world as God made it—a place of justice, where each creature can flourish. The key point in this Corinthians passage is that generosity furthers human flourishing, both for those who receive and for those who give.

Generosity is a gentle and natural way to set the world right. Notice Paul’s words emphasizing abundance: “reap generously,” “cheerful,” “abundantly,” “abound,” “enriched.” These happen when God’s people do something small and simple: they give cheerfully.

**PRAYER** *Lord, help me to see that when I give I am not truly giving anything up. You bring a wonderful harvest for every act of generosity. Make me see this; help me live it.*

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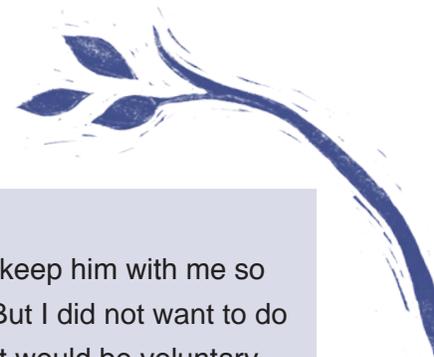
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I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. <sup>13</sup> I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup> But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. <sup>15</sup> Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— <sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.

– Philemon 1:12-16

People sometimes wonder why Paul didn't preach against slavery. The short answer is that he did. The little, powerless Christian church had no power to influence the Roman government, and in fact it's questionable whether the emperor himself could have ended an institution that was so powerful and pervasive. Slaves did everything! They were everywhere!

Nevertheless, Paul's writings undermine slavery at every point by insisting that slaves are really human beings, God's children, worthy of respect. They are not tools, to be used up and discarded!

And in this little book of Philemon, we see what Paul is really after: revolution.

This is not a revolution of blood. Rather it is a revolution of love. Paul gently but firmly urges his friend Philemon to give up his slave Onesimus—his valuable property. But more he urges Philemon to join the revolution, relating to Onesimus not as a slave, but as a dear brother. The two are utterly incompatible. Slaves aren't brothers, and brothers aren't slaves. If Philemon listens to Paul, his days as a slaveholder are over. If the Roman empire listens, its days as a slave state are over too.

Slavery of the kind Paul experienced did eventually die—though it took far too long--but the power of his revolution goes on. Love has a way of chipping away at the foundation of tyranny. We've seen revolutions of blood that only lead to more shed blood. But the true revolution, the one that changes everything, is still coming. That's why we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "your kingdom come." Whenever we treat an enemy or a stranger as a brother, the kingdom comes a little closer.

**PRAYER** *Lord, show me the "dear brothers and sisters" that I don't even recognize.*

— NOTES —

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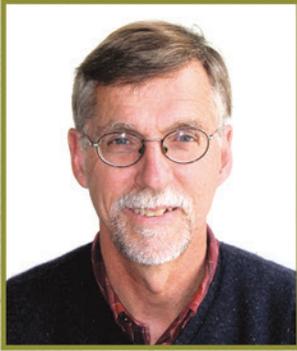
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## Special thanks to Tim Stafford

for writing this incredible reading plan. Tim is the editor for *God's Justice: The Holy Bible* and author of more than 30 books. He lives with his wife Popie in Santa Rosa, California.

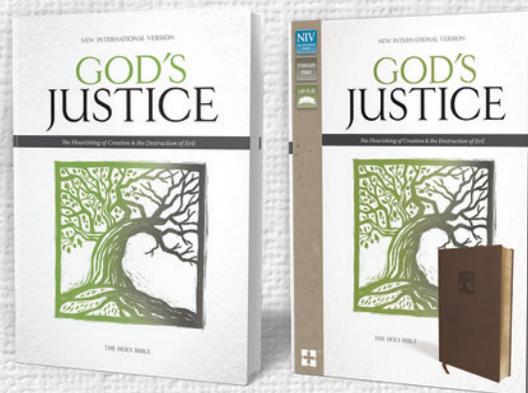
### LEARN TO DO RIGHT. SEEK JUSTICE.

God's justice—his plan for “setting things right”—is a foundational principle of the Bible. His plan for justice to triumph is traced from Genesis to Revelation, and as a theme, it forms the backbone of Scripture. God's plan is to restore the flourishing of creation and to see the end of evil, and every book of the Bible is infused with hints of this powerful and redemptive process.

The NIV God's Justice Bible, featuring Christianity Today Editor at Large Tim Stafford as general editor, brings together clear introductions and thoughtful notes on the biblical text from a mosaic of global perspectives.

*“Traveling to 5 continents and seeking out writers to contribute to this special project was an honor,” says Stafford. “God's Justice represents a new kind of Bible experience, not only because of its emphasis on the story of God's justice – in making things right – but because of its truly international character.”*

This Bible address justice issues through the perspectives of fifty-six contributors who are scholars, activists and ministry leaders from around the globe. The world Christian voice of this Bible is groundbreaking and sheds light on God's work in his diverse cultures so that God's justice story can be told in dozens of different accents. Readers will be inspired to join God's mission for his world as they discover how the entire Bible reveals how God is setting things right so that evil is destroyed and God's creation flourishes.



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