



A Lenten Devotion

Week One

What needs to be fixed?

By Dani El Tayar

For some people, Lent means giving up something or denying ourselves certain things as a reminder that the Son of God gave up everything for us and denied Himself. For others, Lent is also a time of adding something to our normal schedules, such as serving in a community center, spending more time in the presence of God, giving of our resources, or extending love to others who are less fortunate.

At Habitat for Humanity Lebanon, one of our main projects is to organize repairs and rehabs to help vulnerable families – whether they are refugees or Lebanese families in need of a decent place to live. Questions we ask families before the intervention include:

- What are the things that need to be done at your home?
- What would you like to get rid of?
- What would you like to see fixed or added? Why?

Most of the answers we receive enumerate the things families are lacking or things that need to be repaired. Families tell us the changes will make them feel safer and more secure. Addressing what families don't have also restores or creates a sense of dignity that enables some to host neighbors or family members.

The thing that can make a real difference for you and me this Lenten season is to be ready to ask ourselves the same questions we ask those families. I ask you to join me and to look deep within yourself today.

- What are the things that you and I need to change in our lives?
- What do we need to get rid of?
- What needs to be fixed or added?
- And above all, we should ask ourselves: Why?

Prayer

My prayer today is from Psalm 51:10-13, New American Standard Bible:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You.”

Teach me, O Lord, that my thoughts and actions this Lenten season demonstrate clearly my recognition of who You are.

Questions

- Why is it sometimes hard for us to take time for self-examination? What steps do you need to take to do an honest personal assessment?
- What is one thing you need to eliminate from your life? What is preventing you from having a clean heart?
- What do you need to add to your daily routine to allow God to renew your spirit?
- What is one specific change you are willing to commit to this Lenten season?

Dani El Tayar is the national director of Habitat for Humanity Lebanon.



A Lenten Devotion

Week Two

What really matters?

By Hiew Peng Wong

"For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

— 1 Samuel 16:7b, English Standard Version

With over 2 billion active users each month, Facebook is the world's largest social media site. Imagine the number of hours spent creating personas so that others view us as we would like to be seen.

If the prophet Samuel had depended on personas instead of God's wisdom to gauge people's character, social media might have served him well. The sons of Jesse could have curated content and presented their best selves before Samuel. Anointing a king might simply have been based on the number of "likes" or "wows."

Instead, one by one, Jesse's sons passed before the prophet. God warned Samuel not to consider appearance or height. Those features could not determine who was the man after God's own heart. Both David and Saul, who was the first king of Israel, were described as handsome in the Bible. They had also sinned against God. David was forgiven, whereas Saul was rejected by God. As we see in the passage above, what really matters is what is in a person's heart.

The world might judge people for how they look or behave. At Habitat, we learn to see people differently. Whether future homeowners, volunteers or supporters, they are individuals created in God's image. By partnering with them, we demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ and get to be His hands and feet in serving them.

At the same time, we have to guard our hearts against the worldly trappings of success and happiness. We will fall unless we walk closely with God.

During this Lenten season, let us think about what is pure, lovely, worthy of praise. As we focus on our Savior who laid down His life for us, let Him direct our thoughts, words and deeds. The best life is found in serving the risen King.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, forgive us when we are half-hearted in our service, when our trust in You wavers or when our hands grow feeble. Show us that our actions for You count for eternity. We give thanks for the work that You have given to us through Habitat for Humanity. May all praise and honor be to You. Amen.

Questions

- When have you been tempted to judge someone based on appearance or the fact that they are different from you? What lessons did God teach you?
- In your interactions with colleagues, partners or supporters, how do you show that you are a person after God's own heart?
- Have you ever been deceived by your own heart? How has the Lord created a clean heart in you?

Hiew Peng Wong is Habitat for Humanity International's associate director for storytelling in Asia-Pacific.



A Lenten Devotion

Week Three

A new era

By Jacson da Rosa

"Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already — you can see it now! I will make a road through the wilderness and give you streams of water there."

— Isaiah 43:19, Good News Translation

Isaiah's prophecy is very clear: God, who has always been the savior, has saved the people. With Him, the people came out of slavery, and the desert became passable. Through Him, we know how to live; we have His strength so that everything is new.

God's action is not only in the past. We do not believe in Him only because of the wonders He did centuries ago. God is very present in our lives, and in the act of remembering the Resurrection, we celebrate a forever future — eternal life offered to us in Jesus. In this new world that God has promised, there will be no trace of slavery. Instead, Jesus Christ brings us full freedom. His salvation is offered with grace and goodness for life in His kingdom.

Since I began working with Habitat El Salvador in 2016, I have visited countless communities and families, and I have seen the change brought about by adequate housing. Not all families are interested in making shelter improvements at first. They do not see housing as their priority, even though they are living in poor conditions. However, as a house begins to take shape and volunteers come to support the construction, everything changes. It is there I see that God is not only present in the past, but also in the future. On those occasions, I see that Isaiah's prophecy is still relevant — that using many hands, God works to free his people.

As members of an organization founded on Christian principles, we are invited during this time of Lent to seek out this salvific action, hand in hand with God, looking to the future. In this new era that God prepares for us, everyone will have a place to call home, and social gaps will be no more. Followers of Jesus have a deep understanding of the power of hope, and this time of Lent encourages us to always hope for a new era.

Prayer

Loving God, during this season, enlighten us to the path of hope as we remember how You saved us from slavery. We trust You to continue leading us to this new era of joy and sharing. We eagerly await a new era of hope where our voices will be heard. We faithfully await the Resurrection, remembering the One who died for our sins so that we may all be free. We trust in You. Stay with us now and forever. Amen.

Questions

- In what moment of your life did God free you from some form of slavery? How did you feel upon being freed?
- What meaning does Lent have for you? What does it lead you to reflect upon?
- From your position at Habitat, how can you respond effectively to Jesus' invitation to live in and further the kingdom of God here and now?

Jacson da Rosa is the national donor relations coordinator at Habitat for Humanity El Salvador.



A Lenten Devotion

Week Four

Living a life of intention

By Beth Lechner

"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified."

— 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, New Living Translation

Lent is a season of consecration for believers everywhere to reflect upon and prepare for the celebration of the death, burial and resurrection of our savior, Jesus Christ. Many will abstain from life luxuries, commit to more prayer or engage in service activities, but ultimately this season is for us to meditate on the unique position in which we find ourselves as characters in the greatest love story ever told.

The Lenten season also sheds light on how busy the rest of the year can be. Our lives are filled with family, work and obligations. In 1 Corinthians, Paul reminds us that in a race, everyone runs, but only one person wins the prize. Our walk with God does not result in a prize that will fade away, but one that will last forever. Therefore, we should approach each day with a winning mentality.

We should train ourselves to live a life that reflects the triumphant glory of God, not the fatigue that comes with human effort. It is not God's intention for us to just go through the motions of life, but to live purposefully in all that we do so that others may join us in this magnificent race. Paul also warns us of the concern that, after having worked so hard for others, we ourselves are not experiencing the fullness of God's plan for our lives.

In other words, it would be a shame after having labored for this cause of Habitat for Humanity, that you would not find the comfort of home, a community to embrace, or hope that your life is a testimony of God's love. So, as you reflect during this season, make a commitment to God, yourself and to the many people who depend on you that you will approach every day with purpose in your step and intention in your heart.

Prayer

Lord, lift our spirits so that each day we experience all that You intend for our lives. Strengthen us so that we may be fitted for the kingdom of heaven. May we not feel exhausted from running too hard or disillusioned from going about our days aimlessly. Rather, may we be energized and excited as we share with others the good news. During this season of Lent, let us look to the cross as the prize of Your incredible love for us. Amen.

Questions

- In what ways have you struggled with feeling a lack of purpose? What did you do in response?
- What specific behaviors and attitudes have you witnessed in faithful followers of Jesus living with intention?
- How is God speaking to you in this passage?

Beth Lechner is the executive director of Habitat for Humanity East Central Ohio.



A Lenten Devotion

Week Five

The power of kindness

By Kelvin Kalonga

"Is 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? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

— Isaiah 58:6-7, New International Version

One terrible day, Pamela, who was seven months pregnant, realized that her unborn baby had died in the womb. Her colleague Cynthia served as a guardian for Pamela while she was in the hospital. Before the tragedy, Pamela hated Cynthia and gave her a hard time at the office. Cynthia's act of kindness changed Pamela's negative attitude, however, and they became close friends.

In another example of transforming kindness, when an orphan was chased out of school because he couldn't pay school fees, a man assisted him with his payments. When the student finished school and started working, he went to the man who assisted him to thank him and give him money as a token of appreciation. The benefactor refused the money and told the young man to pay it forward — to help someone else along the way. As a result, the orphan set up a foundation that assists needy students with school fees.

Such acts of kindness can change our mindset and inspire us to help others without expecting anything in return. Being kind not only has a direct positive effect on others, it also has a positive impact on our lives.

Providing a hand up to help people build or improve a decent place to live is a tangible way that we can help others experience the kindness of a loving God. Many future homeowners then demonstrate a loving spirit when doing tasks such as providing water and passing mortar while helping others work on their homes.

God demonstrated his kindness by sending his only Son to die on the cross for us. Jesus showed his kindness by volunteering himself to die a painful death for us as atonement for our sins. Our response is to lead a life of kindness.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You for this time of reflection during the Lenten season. Thank You for helping me to understand that kindness is never wasted, but rather it is always a blessing for the giver. Help me to show unconditional kindness to my family, friends, community and all those with whom I work at Habitat. Use me as an instrument of Your kindness so that the world is a better place. Amen.

Questions

- In what instances have you witnessed acts of kindness yielding dramatic results?
- Can you think of a time when you demonstrated kindness without expecting anything in return?
- Think of someone whom you have a difficult time treating kindly. What is a specific act of kindness you will direct toward that person today?

Kelvin Kalonga is the national director of Habitat for Humanity Malawi.



A Lenten Devotion

Week Six

Our lives transfigured

By Lisa Lefkow

Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

— Matthew 17:3-4, New Revised Standard Version

The story of the transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-9 is one of my favorites. After all, who doesn't love a story that includes Peter wanting to build a bunch of little houses in that moment of extraordinary commotion?

As we journey on our Lenten road, this Scripture does so much more than amuse me, however. Here, we encounter the fullness of the Trinity – God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – and we acknowledge the importance of the moment. Through the appearance of Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets, Matthew reminds us that we must cherish the gifts of the past as we continue to move into God's future, led by the Holy Spirit.

In this day when Habitat organizations are faced with pressures of finding ways to serve more families and of being relevant in our various contexts, it is critical that we honor our core values and our foundational principles. We must continue to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ in all that we do. A primary part of that demonstration of love is to act in ways that are radically inclusive. Muriel's home dedication brought this reminder to life for me. Muriel had been born into a prominent Nicaraguan family that was persecuted by the Sandinistas. His brother was murdered in front of the family, and the parents paid a coyote, one who smuggles migrants, to bring Muriel to the United States. With political asylum, he worked two full-time jobs for years to save enough money to bring his wife and children to join him.

Once reunited, they focused on their future by becoming Habitat homeowners. At their home dedication, Muriel, speaking in broken English, delivered a heartfelt message of gratitude. "I came to this country as a stranger," he said. "But today, I look at all of you who have helped make this dream come true and see only brothers and sisters."

Among those gathered were members of the Temple, faithful Christians, other individuals with great faith, and some of no faith at all. Also present were donors, volunteers and supporters who hailed from different countries and who had skin of varying tones. They were his friends and neighbors. It was a powerful moment of transfiguration as we witnessed the radically inclusive love of Jesus Christ demonstrated through the testimony of this one family.

The last line of our Scripture text may raise an eyebrow for those of us who want to shout about God's love from the mountaintop. A quote often ascribed to St. Francis of Assisi is "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." Too often, we talk a good talk but fail to walk a faithful walk. In reminding Peter, James and John not to talk about their experience, I hear Jesus reminding me to simply live out the Gospel imperative: "Stop talking and just love everyone, just as God does." In this, our lives are transfigured, and we move closer to God and God's future of hope and promise.

Prayer

God of all, You have called us Your children, woven us into one family and endowed us with various gifts. As we travel along our Lenten journey, help us to remember the gifts of the past and to recognize the importance of these foundations. May we continue to grow in our demonstration of Your relentless love for all people, until we reach that day when all of Your children have a good, healthy and affordable place to live. Thank You for those moments of transfiguration when we see Jesus in one another's eyes. It is in Your name that we pray. Amen.

Questions

- How are you keeping Habitat's core values and foundational principles alive in your organization? In what specific ways are you personally demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ during this Lenten season?
- Where is Jesus leading you to a new and transformative moment?
- How have you witnessed God's radically inclusive love demonstrated recently?

Lisa Lefkow is the chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity of Collier County.



A Lenten Devotion

Week Seven

More than enough

By Jenny Williams

They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

— Luke 9:17, New International Version

As we contemplate the journey of Jesus to the cross this Lenten season and prepare our hearts to celebrate Easter, let us reflect on how powerful the act of sharing can be.

In a world that is haunted by conflict, poverty and greed, we could be overwhelmed by the challenges. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle story, apart from the Resurrection, recorded in all four Gospels. It's a favorite Sunday school story, which teaches us so much about trusting in God's goodness and about the need for us to be His hands and feet to bless others. Recall that as the crowd swelled all around them, Jesus told the disciples to give the people something to eat.

I can imagine their disbelief. There were just too many people. They didn't have anything to offer, and yet, when they trusted Jesus, not only were the people fed and satisfied, there was more than enough food left over. God will shatter our small expectations if we will only bring what we have. Little is much when God is in it. When we offer our lives sacrificially, God will use us in extraordinary ways.

It is indeed extraordinary that 29 million people worldwide now have better lives, thanks to Habitat's ministry and thousands of small acts of faith.

I have had the privilege to spend International Women's Day in Delhi for the past few years. Standing with women who have been economically and socially marginalized for generations is a humbling experience. There is so much need.

A few years ago, I met Ruby and her delightful family. In fact, I helped knock down their home because it had been built without a proper foundation — a stark reminder of the vulnerability of the poor. Yet Ruby was resilient and determined to build a better future. And she was happy to share all that she had.

Like the disciples in the Bible story, Ruby would say she had nothing to give. However, she gave us so much – a warm welcome, a willingness to share her life, and lovingly prepared chai tea every morning. I saw Ruby again last year and was thrilled to see that her family was thriving. I was able to buy some soap from the small shop they have opened on the ground floor of their home, which they had already extended upward.

Our mission statement – “Seeking to put God’s love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities and hope” – speaks to the power promised to each of us when we fulfill God’s call on our lives.

As we look toward the cross and the Resurrection, we can be confident. The need is too big for us alone, but we are not alone. We follow Jesus, and we follow not as people who have it all sorted, but as people who trust in God’s mercy, grace and power.

Prayer

Lord of every time and place, help us to fully understand the incredible power of Your love, and may everything we do witness to the truth of the Resurrection. As we look to the cross, remind us afresh that the same power that raised Christ from the dead lives in each of us. More and more, make us the means by which prayers are answered in our communities and around the world. Amen.

Questions

- Jesus used the disciples to feed the hungry crowd. What can that teach us about working together?
- How can we use the gifts we have been given to reach out to others in our community and our world?
- What can we learn from those who have the least?

Jenny Williams is the chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity Ireland.