



HERE FOR GOOD

BRADLEY HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

EIGHT-DAY LEAD DONOR DEVOTIONAL GUIDE





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DAY ONE

Tears streamed down Steve's face as he stood before the congregation and shared his stewardship story. Steve is a physician who literally came up the hard way. Steve's mother self medicated. As an infant, Steve was often rescued from bars and street corners. Steve survived. Against all odds, he went to college and on to medical school. He successfully completed his residency as the first African-American in the program. Steve now has his own very successful practice. If anyone ever had the right to say they were "self-made", it would be Steve.

And yet, as I heard Steve tell his story, it was never about Steve but always about gratitude and God. Steve recognized it was the hand of God that had saved him, not his own. Steve somehow knew that everything he had was a gift, a gift from the hand of a loving and compassionate God. Because Steve realized everything was a gift, he was therefore willing to give back in amazingly generous ways.

Take a moment and look at your hands. Are these the hands that have created your life? Are these the hands that have made you successful? Is your life and all that you have and all you've accomplished the work of these hands? In gazing at your own hands, can you somehow see the hand of God? Right now as you gaze at your hands, say, "thank you! All that I am and all that I have are the result of your hands. Thank you!"

O God, I confess it is so very easy to look at my hands and think of all that I have accomplished and done. Help me, O God, to see your hands. Help me, O God, to recognize you as the source of all that I have and all that I am. And help me to give back in gratitude. Thank you God! Amen.



DAY TWO

What about love? Do we spend time thinking about the debt of love we owe? The truth is this: none of us is self-made. Each of us has been loved into the people we have become. We all owe a debt of love. Our debt of love is so much greater than a house loan or car loan. A car will be paid off or traded in; a home mortgage will someday come to an end. The debt of love . . . NEVER. This debt of love begins with a God who loved us before we even knew God existed; who loved us in spite of who we are or were. This debt of love continues with a mother, father, in-laws, youth workers, teachers, friends, spouses and children, aunts and uncles, pastors and Sunday school teachers: all who helped make us who we are. This debt of love can never be repaid in full. All we can do is continue day-by-day and moment-by-moment making payments of love to the people we live with, work with, worship with, play with, and the strangers we meet.

Spend a few moments reflecting on your debt of love. Who do you owe? Will you be making any payments today or only withdrawals?

Thank you, God, for your amazing gift of love. Thank you for the people who have loved me into who I have become. Help me, Lord, to make payments of love today. Amen.



DAY THREE

Her name is Amanda and she is a walking, talking, breathing miracle. Amanda is 20 and a few years ago was in a serious automobile accident. Amanda was declared dead at the scene. On the ride to the hospital, she had a seizure and her heart stopped beating. While technically alive, Amanda was in a deep coma with no real hope of recovery. The doctors told her parents there was a one in ten to fifteen million chance Amanda would ever recover. Clearly, someone forgot to tell God. Amanda will tell you that she met Jesus and Jesus told her to go back home to her family. Amanda came back, slowly.

While Amanda still has challenges to overcome, her face radiates joy. Amanda is likely, at any moment, to break into a loud praise to God. Who can blame her? Amanda reminds me that the abundant life is not found in the things that I own or the money I make. The voices whispering in my ear, "Abundance is found in things or stuff," are the voices of robbers and thieves. Amanda reminds me, the abundant life is simply a life filled with gratitude and joy for this moment, the only moment I truly have. Have I listened to the voices of the "robbers and thieves"? What does the abundant life mean to me?

O God, far too often I listen to the voices of thieves and robbers whispering in my ear about what I need for the abundant life. Forgive me. Help me to live like Amanda. Help me to live in this moment with gratitude, joy, and faith. Amen.



DAY FOUR

He was a World War II veteran living in a tiny Russian village on the outer edges of Siberia in 1995. He wore a tattered blue blazer with a chest full of medals. No American had ever set foot in their village, and he had not seen or met an American since the battle to capture Berlin over fifty years before. As he spoke through the interpreter, it soon became apparent that in his eyes, the American standing before him represented and, in fact, spoke for the entire United States, its people, its government, and even its president. The American chose his words carefully and tried to convey genuine respect and gratitude. Before the American left, they hugged and cried. The American prayed he had represented his country well.

Meanwhile, live in such a way that you are a credit to the Message of Christ.

We represent Christ to the world. By our words, by our actions, by our Facebook posts, by the jokes we tell, the places we invest and spend our money; we represent Christ. Our friends, family, and co-workers will learn about God's love and grace through us. The look on our faces, the tone of our voices, where we spend our money, all speak of God. The question is, what are they saying?

O God, help me today to represent You and Your unconditional love and grace. I pray that through my words and my actions people might see and know your amazing grace and love. Amen.

Meanwhile, live in such a way that you are a credit to the the Message of Christ.



DAY FIVE

Barb owns a private plane, but rarely flies it. However, Barb enjoys the satisfaction of knowing the plane belongs to her. For about eighteen months, Barb had this nagging thought that she should perhaps sell the plane. Barb even began to get the strange thought that maybe God was the One doing the nagging.

Barb wrestled with God daily for over a year and finally gave in. Not because having a plane was wrong, but because for Barb, it was a possession getting in the way of her relationship with God. Coincidentally, (if you believe in coincidences) this occurred in the midst of her church's capital campaign. For Barb there were no fireworks and no miracles... just a quiet act of obedience and generosity. Barb will be the first to tell you there may be another plane in her future, but this plane will NOT get in the way of her relationship with God.

We all have those things that separate us from God. Like Barb, it might be our "stuff." For some, it might be pride, fear, a grudge, a refusal to forgive, a job, or a relationship. Spend a few minutes asking God, "What keeps me from loving you with all of my heart?"

O God, thank you for your divine patience. Thank you for loving me even as I stubbornly cling to my way and my stuff. Help me to name it and help me to surrender. Amen.



DAY SIX

We often think that Jesus really just loves the poor, the sick and the downtrodden. And he does. But Jesus also has a very special place in his heart for those with resources and, yes, even those with wealth. Jesus wants those with wealth and resources to know him, love him and follow him.

The real question being asked by Jesus is, “What do you love more than me?” For this young man, the answer was clear. He loved stuff, money and wealth more than Jesus. And so the young man turned away. And Jesus let him go. Can you imagine this scene in your head?

The man’s face clouded over. This was the last thing he expected to hear, and he walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go.

Jesus looks us hard in the eye and with a heart overflowing with love, asks, “What do you love more than me?” “What are you holding tightly and not about to let go?” For a mother or father, it could be children. For someone else, it could be a parent or even a spouse. For others, the answer may be found in a job, a career, a home. For many of us, it may very well be our wealth and our stuff. Maybe it’s the sense of pride and accomplishment that comes with having wealth and all the right “stuff.” Maybe it’s something very different like anger, bitterness or an unwillingness to forgive that we refuse to release. Jesus stands in front of you, looks you hard in the eye with love and asks, “What do you love more than me?”

God, I want to love you with all my heart. But there always seems to be stuff that gets in the way. Help me now, today, to let go, to release whatever my stuff is to you, your love, and your care. Amen.



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DAY SEVEN

When it comes to getting into the water, there are typically two kinds of people; those who plunge and those who tiptoe. Some just hate swimming in cold or even slightly chilly water and will tiptoe around the edge of a dock or along a beach. Then there are those brave or crazy souls who just stand back and, with a shout, run and take the plunge.

Sometimes the same is true for our faith and certainly for our giving. Sometimes we tiptoe around God and God's promises saying, "when I am a bit more comfortable, or when God makes things a bit more clear, when my return on investments is higher or my kids are done with school, then I will take the plunge of generosity." Unfortunately, we are never quite comfortable enough and things are never quite clear enough. We never seem to have enough; there is always something else to buy or in which to invest. The water is never quite warm enough and so we tiptoe and refuse to take the plunge.

Is God calling you to take the plunge of generosity? Have you perhaps been tiptoeing around the edges waiting until the water is just a bit warmer? Today, take the plunge! Claim the promise of Abraham who ". . . didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what God had said."

God, I don't want to keep tiptoeing around you. Grant me the courage and the faith to take the plunge and leap into the water of your promises. Amen.



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DAY EIGHT

I watched as Ben slowly and painfully pulled himself out of the car and began shuffling with his two canes to the front door. After the home gathering, I was determined to meet this gentleman who had clearly made a concerted effort to get to what was, in essence, a meeting designed to ask people for money. As I approached Ben, he put one cane down and with an iron-like grip grasped my forearm saying, “Hey Preacher! Are you the one who’s leading this campaign?” Hmmm. Do I admit it or not? “Yes, Ben, I am helping your church with this campaign.”

Ben continued, “Let me tell you something, Preacher.” Now I was truly worried! With his firm grip on my forearm and a twinkle in his eye, Ben then said, “I am 92 years old and I spent most of last night wrestling with God. You see, I’ve already helped build two churches and at 92, I can’t tell you how excited I am to help build one more.” Ben let go of my arm and slowly shuffled out to the car. I was stunned, almost speechless. Ben could have so easily said “At 92, I’ve done my share. I’ve done enough.”

When I am 92, I hope and pray I might spend the night like Ben wrestling with God, asking, “God what do you want to do through me?” No matter our age or circumstance, God always calls us to reach and stretch, to move out of our comfort zone. And as we wrestle with God, like Jacob and like Ben, we will indeed be blessed!

O God, give me the courage of Jacob and Ben to wrestle with you. Give me the courage and faith to ask, “God, what do you want to do through me?” Amen.



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