

God wants to work in your life! We truly believe that. For him to be able to speak to you, however, you have to be still and listen. What follows are six weeks of devotionals written especially to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus.

Each week has five daily devotionals. Each devotional will take you about 15–20 minutes. Some days will be a longer and some shorter than others. If you miss a day or even a week, don't panic. Just start with the next devotional. If you want to do this before or even after the suggested date, go for it. We just want you to grow!

If you do the devotions at the suggested time, your youth minister may be doing lessons that relate to them, so you should get even more out of them. We have included two weeks of devotionals written for you by your peers. These are found in weeks five and six.

These devotionals are a part of the bigger picture of Spread the Word (STW). Spread the Word is an opportunity for Church of God teenagers to give in support of evangelistic efforts that spread the love of Jesus around the world. STW gives specifically to tools for evangelism. Cars, vans, trucks, motorcycles, sound systems, projectors, and printed evangelistic materials, and other evangelism tools can help those working in other countries get the message of Jesus out.

You can be a part of investing in storing up heavenly treasures by investing in something that will make an eternal difference.

You may want to give up going to the movies for the next month and take the money and give to Spread the Word. You may want to give up soft drinks during this time and pledge the money saved to STW. You may want to take the money you would have spent on clothes, CD's, or DVD's during the next month and give to STW—whatever God lays on your heart.

The STW challenge is above your tithes and offering to your local church. If your youth leaders don't know about STW, tell them and challenge them to get involved. If you need more information on STW, check out www.chogy.org.

Spreading the Word with you,

STW team

Week One —*Things vs. Treasures*

Day 1 Study

You have just been shipwrecked on a deserted island, nowhere near civilization. While searching for ways to escape, you discovered a buried treasure of gold, silver, and rare gems. You are excited. You are now filthy rich, covered in sand and dirt, with millions of dollars of treasure at your feet. You have never been this excited. You start jumping up and down, yelling and screaming, because of all this wealth. You can buy anything you want—as long as it’s on the island. Suddenly, you stop. What is there to buy on this stupid, dirty, sandy little island? You’re getting hungry and thirsty; you have enough money to pay \$10 for a coke, \$25 for a Whopper, or \$100 for a large double-pepperoni pizza. But you can’t buy what you really want—something to eat, something to drink, and something to get you off this stupid island before someone makes it into a stupid TV show.

Then you start thinking your deep spiritual thoughts again and decide this really means something about treasure and what is important to you. You sit down on the treasure chest (closed, of course) and ask yourself, “Self, just what does God want me to discover here?” And you decide to find out.

Memory Verse— We encourage you to put this verse somewhere you can see it and memorize it.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt 6:19–21).

What is God saying to you through this verse?

Things vs. Treasures

Day 2 Study

Make a list of “The Ten Most Important Things in My Life.” You can put anything on your list:

- stuff, such as your stereo, your car, a skateboard;
- people, such as your parents, your best friend, your algebra teacher;
- places, such as your room, the hills and woods where you go hunting, the band room;
- abstract things, such as your intelligence, your popularity, your athletic ability, a talent.

They do not have to be your own personal items; they can be something owned by your whole family, something at school, or a place that’s not really owned by anyone. List whatever is *the most important* to you, things that you would be pretty upset to lose or not have anymore.

Create your list:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

How many are things you can touch or see?

How many are abstract ideas or concepts?

How many are people?

Next, put them in order from *most important* to *least important* to you.

Look at your list of ten things. For each item on the list, ask yourself, “Is there any way I can lose this?” If so, mark through it.

Spend time today thinking about these ten things that are important to you, and what Jesus said in (Matt 6:19–21).

Now consider this: you have been selected to be part of an exploratory team to create a settlement on the moon for two years. NASA is going to build an “earth-dome” which simulates your hometown as closely as possible. But there is limited time and space for them to build it, so you have to give them a list of only three things you **must have** to be willing to live there. (Stretch your imagination a little: you can take anything on your list, even the places and people, but only three; nothing else can go.)

Why did you pick these three?

How would the list be different if you were going forever instead of for two years?

Things vs. Treasures

Day 3 Study

What is the most common place for your family to store stuff you aren’t using right now?

If you can, go there now and continue the rest of your time with God there. If you can’t, answer these questions as well as you can from memory.

Describe the storage space. Is it full, cluttered, organized? Are things in boxes with labels or just crammed in?

What does it look like?
What does it smell like?
What does it sound like?

Would you be afraid to spend the night in there with no light? Why or why not?

Describe a time when something that was stored there was destroyed or damaged (such as water damage from a leak or a hole chewed by a mouse). How did you react?

Read the Verse again (Matt 6:19–21).

What does Jesus mean by “treasures”?

Why did he use “treasures” instead of “money”?

By saying this, Jesus meant
Never put anything in storage.
Never buy anything that can be destroyed by moths or rust.
Build strong bars on your house to keep thieves out.
Don’t put too much value in things.
Money is bad.
Clean out your closets often.

Fill out the table with what you believe are some earthly treasures and what are some heavenly treasures. List at least five in each column.

Earthly Treasures	Heavenly Treasures
Examples: Money, clothes	Examples: Giving money to poor, People you have witnessed to

What is God revealing to you?

List some differences between earthly treasures and heavenly treasures.

Things vs. Treasures

Day 4 Study

If you are memorizing Matthew 6:19-21, try to write it down without looking.

Look at your list again of the most important things from Day 2. Put the top five in the table in the space provided where you think they fit best—earthly treasures or heavenly treasures (sorry, but your CD collection is *not* a heavenly treasure, even if it is all Christian music).

Describe how you decided where to put them.

The point Jesus is making is to change what is important to us. “Stuff” isn’t bad but making it too valuable is. If you make things too important, you will be disappointed because they can disappear or be destroyed. Most things—like money, abilities, possessions, and friends—can be either an earthly treasure or a heavenly one. The difference is how you value them and how they are used.

Spend time today praying about the things on your list. Give them back to God and ask him to show you how to make sure they are in the right priority.

Things vs. Treasures

Day 5 Study

Start your time today praying. Think about the storage area you described in Day 3 and picture that you have placed all your important things in there. Now, one by one, picture yourself picking them up and presenting them to God. Say, “Father, I want you to move this into your heavenly storage area. Show me how to change how important this is and how to use it for you.”

Look at Matthew 13:44–46; Jesus is talking about treasure again. How does this relate to what you’ve been studying this week? Isn’t Jesus contradicting himself by saying “go after treasure”?

Consider what you think is valuable and ask yourself these questions.
Do I have more things in an earthly storage or a heavenly one?

Are my priorities in the right order?

Do I spend more money on myself or for God?

Would I rather give away the money I would spend on a CD to see the good news of Jesus spread around the world, or keep it for myself?

Am I more concerned about how I look or about how I act toward other people?

If you are memorizing the verse in Matthew complete Jesus' words, from memory: "For where your treasure is...."

Write down what you would like to change about how important earthly things are to you.

Challenge

Choose something on your list of ten things that you spend money on regularly and write it here. Are you willing for the next 40 days to give the money you would have spent during that time on that item to Spread the Word?

Week 2 —Discovering the Joy of Giving

Day 1 Study

Thankfully, you are quickly rescued from the deserted island. You are excited about being back home with all your friends and family. You missed them all more than you thought you would. You really don't want to let them out of your sight again. The rescue chopper allowed you to bring back a few pieces of the treasure you found, but not enough to make you filthy rich. (The filthy part is true, just not the rich part.) Since you are so pumped about being back home with everyone, you start giving out all these little jewels and gold pieces. You want everybody you know to share your excitement about being lost and now rescued. Just the idea of being back on solid ground is so awesome that you want everybody else to understand it too. You give away to each of them part of what you brought back—not because you have to; because you want to.

This week we are going to look at the joys of giving and find out how to move from an “I-have-to-give-away-my-money” attitude to a “How-can-I-use-all-this-money-for-God?” attitude.

Memory Verse We encourage you to put this verse somewhere you can see it and memorize it. *Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7, NRSV).*

What is God saying to you through this verse?

Discovering the Joy of Giving

Day 2 Study

Think back over all the different gifts you received for Christmas, birthdays, graduations, or any other special occasion. Select one that you remember as very special simply because the gift itself was awesome. Next, pick one that was very special because of the person who gave it to you, something like a pocketknife from your grandfather or a book of poetry from your best friend.

Explain why these two different gifts mean so much to you.

Think back over all the different gifts or presents you have given to someone else, and pick one that stands out as a gift that you were really excited about giving. Explain why you enjoyed giving that particular gift to that person.

Read Matthew 2:1–12 (the story of the wise men coming to visit Jesus when he was born).

There are several different theological explanations for the gifts that they brought. One explanation goes like this:

Gold for his royalty.

Incense for his high priesthood.

Myrrh for his death and burial.

Spend a few minutes thinking about these gifts and what they must have meant to Jesus and his family. Consider: If Jesus had been born today and you were one of the wise guys (Oops we mean, wise ones), what three gifts would you bring to Jesus? (Stretch your imagination; there are no correct answers for this.)

Discovering the Joy of Giving

Day 3 Study

Today we're going to look at some of the Old Testament rules for giving.

Read the following scriptures and use them to answer the following questions.

Genesis 14:17–20

Exodus 22:29–30

Exodus 35:4–9

Leviticus 27:30–33

Numbers 18:8–10, 25–29

Deuteronomy 14:22–23

Deuteronomy 26:12

How much was to be set aside as a tithe?

List at least five things that would be given as an offering.

List the requirements for things to be acceptable as offerings; why?

List three purposes for the tithes and offerings the Lord asked the people to give.

Now spend a few minutes thinking about trying to please God by giving the right kind and amount of “stuff.”

Discovering the Joy of Giving

Day 4 Study

Today we will look at some of the New Testament ideas about giving.

Read these scriptures and then consider the questions that follow:

Matthew 6:3
2 Corinthians 9:7
1 Corinthians 16:2
Mark 12:41–44
2 Corinthians 8:1–7
Acts 5:1–11

1. List at least four “rules” for proper giving:
2. How much are you supposed to give?
3. How is the concept of giving in the New Testament different from what is taught in the Old Testament; what does this difference teach you?
4. What is the main reason we are to give away what we have?

Do you remember the chest you discovered when you were shipwrecked on the island a few days ago? You thought it was merely a bunch of trinkets. You never realized there was more money than you had ever seen in your life. Now you get to decide how to spend that money. Its value is \$10,000,000 (ten million dollars).

List how you would give away that money. You can keep none of it. Write down the people or organizations who would receive your gifts. You must have at least five, but no more than fifteen, different places or names on your list. It doesn't have to be the same amount to everyone. For example, you might send \$5,000,000 to the Red Cross, \$2,000,000 to Compassion International, \$1,000,000 to your youth pastor, \$1,000,000 for a new cafeteria at school, and so on.

Now spend a few minutes praying for each person or organization you listed. Ask the Father to provide everything they *need*. While you're at it, ask God to use you to help make it happen.

Discovering the Joy of Giving

Day 5 Study

How often do you give money to the following organizations?

(Mark each line using the first letter of the following words that describe the frequency: **Weekly, Monthly, Yearly, Occasionally, Frequently, Rarely, Never**)

_____ Your church

_____ Missions (Spread the Word; other organizations like Wycliffe Bible Translators, Youth with a Mission, and so forth)

_____ Charities (The United Way, American Red Cross, American Heart Association, and so forth)

_____ People begging (street corners, subway stations)

_____ Fundraisers (sports team, band, choir, and so forth)

_____ Friends who need money

_____ Causes (Cancer Society, AID's research, environmental groups, and so forth)

What kind of person or group is the easiest for you to give to? The hardest? Why?

In general, how difficult or easy is it for you to give away your money? (Put a dollar sign (\$) on the line in the space provided)

Difficult

Easy

How do you feel when you see someone on the street corner with a sign "Hungry & Homeless... Please help" asking for money?

How do you respond when a good friend says, "I need five dollars for lunch today"?

Read Matthew 19:16–24, the story of the rich young man.

1. What laws had the rich young man kept?
2. What two things did Jesus ask him to do before following Jesus?
3. Why did the guy decide not to follow Jesus?

By this story, Jesus is showing that _____ are more important than _____.

The secret to discovering the joy of giving is really understanding that people are more important than possessions and that when you give money to others, it helps them. Make a list of things that *could* happen when you give money away. (We helped you with a couple.)

1. Someone might become a Christian because they heard the good news of Jesus through Spread the Word (STW).
2. Someone might get to eat today instead of going hungry.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Spend the rest of your time with God reflecting on what might happen with your money, even if it's just a few bucks. Ask him to help you understand how much more important people are than stuff.

Challenge

Take a portion of your income for a particular week (allowance, job salary, birthday present money) and give a minimum of a tithe to your local church. Give another portion away to Spread the Word. Don't just give a token, give a significant amount.

Journal how it went and the effect your gift will have on the recipients and you.

**Week 3 —
Creating a Lifestyle of Giving**

Day 1 Study

While you were stranded on that deserted island with Gilligan and Ginger, you decided that *if* you were ever rescued you would change a few things. First, all your windsurfing and sailing were going to be much closer to shore from now on. Second, you would get a real Swiss army knife. Third, you would share everything you have with your family and friends, because they are much more important than anything else. You realized while you were alone that people are much more important to you than your board, your skates, your car, or your CD player. You got pretty lonely and decided that you would make up for it when you got rescued by making sure these persons knew how important they are to you. So you decided to devote all your time, energy, and money to making them feel important. This thought lasted about a week.

Last week we talked about giving money away to people or groups that need it. But, *giving* is not only about money; there's a whole lifestyle centered around giving yourself away. This week we're going to learn about that *Lifestyle of Giving*.

Memory Verse— We encourage you to put this verse somewhere you can see it and memorize it *Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing* (Phil 2:3–4, NLT).

What is God saying to you through this verse?

Creating a Lifestyle of Giving

Day 2 Study

Estimate, in hours, how much time you spend each week doing the following things:

_____ school (in class) _____ chores at home _____ doing nothing
_____ school (homework) _____ sleeping _____ eating
_____ church _____ working out _____ sports
_____ music (band, choir, piano) _____ music (listening) _____ job
_____ shopping _____ hanging with friends _____ hobbies
_____ other

If you had fourteen more hours each week, how would you spend them?

Would you rather have two extra hours each day or fourteen extra hours all at one time? Why?

From what you remember of Jesus' life, list several examples a time when he spent helping others rather than helping himself.

What is the difference between spending your time on eternal things versus temporary things? List some examples of each.

Read Luke 10:25–37, the story of the Good Samaritan.

What words would you use to describe the kind of attitude it takes to spend your time doing something for someone else?

Spend some time thinking about how you can show two persons that you love them as much as you love yourself.

Pick someone in your family.

Pick someone you know at school (or a neighbor), but not one of your closest friends; or pick someone you don't know, such as a custodian at school or an elderly person in a nursing home.

Think of one way you could give away your time to help each of these people. It can be something *really big*, like “do their chores for one year”; or something not quite so big, like “take out the trash for my little brother when it's his turn this week.”

Family Member

1.

Friend/Neighbor or
someone you don't know

1.

Creating a Lifestyle of Giving

Day 3 Study

List in chronological order the different jobs or careers you dreamed of as you've grown up.

Circle all the ones you might still be interested in.

What was Jesus' occupation before he started his ministry? (Hint it starts with a *C* and involves hammers.)

What was the most common occupation of his disciples? (Hint it involves water and slimy things.)

During the three years of Jesus' ministry, what do you think the disciples did about their respective careers?

What is the difference between a "secular" job and a "ministry" job?

The following are typically secular careers. Describe how they could be turned into ministry careers. We helped you with the first one.

Lawyer provide legal advice and service to poor people who can't afford it

Journalist

Computer specialist

Mechanic

Nurse

Graphic artist

Firefighter

Not everyone is called to a "full-time" ministry career, like a pastor or missionary, but God has asked everyone to dedicate everything about their lives to him, including their career. No matter what your career turns out to be, God wants you to give it away by using it for him.

Spend time with God now to focus on your future. Don't ask him to show you what your job will be or what kind of career you will have; instead, talk with him about how to use whatever job you have for his kingdom.

Creating a Lifestyle of Giving
Day 4 Study

During the previous two days, you considered the meaning of giving away your time and your career. Today we want to look at what it takes to get there—*attitude*.

Read Philippians 2:1–8, NIV.

Paul asked the Philippians to have the same attitude as _____.

Describe that attitude here.

What should be our attitude toward other people?

Review Luke 10:25–37.

Summarize Jesus' words about love and Paul's words about attitude. How do the two fit together?

Pray about your attitude toward other people; ask God to show you any specific attitude or feelings toward a specific person that you need to change.

Creating a Lifestyle of Giving

Day 5 Study

A lifestyle of giving starts with the attitude that other people are very important, even more important than you. Because they are important to God, they should be important to you. Because they are important to God—and you—you love them very much. Because you love them, you hate it when they hurt, you rejoice when they are happy, you celebrate with them when good things happen, and you sacrifice part of yourself for them. Therefore, you spend time doing things for people, you dedicate your career to helping others, you give money to help them, and on and on and on. That's the attitude that Jesus had: he loved people so much that he gave up his position, his comfort, his money, even his life, so that they would be better off than before.

There are other parts of living a Lifestyle of Giving that God may help you give up—other than time, money, and career. Explain briefly how each of the following could be given away to help others.

- Comfort (For example, living in a very poor neighborhood or on the street to minister to people.)

- Reputation
- Health
- Hobby
- Rights

Read the following verses of Jesus' Lifestyle of Giving. Indicate what you believe he is "giving up" in each passage.

- Matthew 8:1–4 (For example, comfort, health)
- Matthew 9:10–11
- Mark 1:35–37
- Mark 11:15–18
- John 8:3–11
- John 19:1–3, 10–11

Take a few minutes to think about all the ways Jesus gave.

Now, evaluate where you are in terms of being a giver. Rate yourself from 1 to 10 on your willingness to give in the following areas (1 is "bad news" and 10 means you are just like Jesus):

Time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Money	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Career	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Comfort	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Rights	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Reputation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Make a commitment to God to live a Lifestyle of Giving in every part of your life. Ask him to show you and teach you how to get there.

Challenge

Pick one of the people from Day 3 (family member, friend, or stranger) and actually do what you put on your list.

PS. Have you made a pledge to STW?

Week 4 — Making a Difference

Day 1 Study

Have you ever experienced someone who is really nice to you? Maybe your parents had a lot of chores for you to do one weekend and you didn't get your homework done and your teacher had compassion on you. Okay, we know a lot of you are saying, *I wish! My teacher is more like a Marine drill Sergeant who gets up on the wrong side of the bed every morning!* Seriously, though, have you ever had any one really show love and compassion towards you? Maybe it was a friend, a parent, or one of your youth leaders. What happens when someone is kind to us? Do you think it makes a difference in how people see you—or listen to you?

Memory Verse: We encourage you to put this verse somewhere you can see it and memorize it. “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17, NIV).

What does this verse mean to you?

Day 2 Study

Let's imagine we are on a biking expedition across the country, peddling along. After a few days, most of us would probably be pretty sore. Our leg muscles would ache, and other parts of our bodies would be saying we should have bought the more expensive bicycle seat. What drives us on; what keeps us from giving up? For some of us it would be pride: we told our friends we were going to make it across the country and we aren't going home until we do. For others of us it would be the pressure of the other bikers: we don't want anyone on the trip to be disappointed with us or call us a quitter. So we are driven to pedal on. In life, people are driven by various things. Some people will do anything to be famous; others will do anything to have a boyfriend or girlfriend; others will do anything to _____; well, you fill in the blank.

List some things that people you know are driven by today?

An example:

_____ Popularity _____

Check out Colossians 3:5–9, and underline in your Bible things people could be driven by. Choose three different things you found in Colossians or listed. Think about a person you know or have heard about who is driven by each item. Write their initials and the reason you listed them in that particular area below.

What are you driven by? Is it a need to be popular, succeed, get a good job? Are you driven by money, your parents, or how you look? List a few items that drive you.

At the heart of all we have been studying over the last few weeks is this statement: If we are going to be Christ followers, we must become like Christ. What do you think he was driven by?

Check out Matthew 14:14 for an example of what motivated Jesus. Read it again and circle in your Bible what Jesus felt towards the people. Write it here

Check out these scriptures:

2 Corinthians 5:14

1 Corinthians 16:14

Circle what should motivate us.

Take a few minutes. Look back at your answers to what drives you. Compare those to what should be driving us. What would you have to change in your life to be motivated by love and compassion?

Making a Difference

Day 3 Study

Let's say we are riding along on our bike trip and a dog runs out in front of Johnny. He wrecks trying to avoid it. Now this isn't just your normal get a Band-Aid wreck; Johnny is bleeding big time. Blood is pouring from his nose, his forehead, his arm, and both his legs. Johnny needs help. I don't know about you, but most of us (me included) don't like to touch bloody bodies. Yet if someone doesn't go over and physically touch and help Johnny, he may be in serious trouble. He needs more than someone to simply say he needs help—he needs a touch. Jesus is a great example of touching and ministering to the untouchables. Check it out.

Read Mark 1:40–42.

What happened in this story?

What do you think Jesus was filled with or motivated by? _____

In biblical times leprosy was a feared disease. A leper was banished from his family, his friends, and forced to live outside the city. Whenever anyone came near the leper, the leper would have to call out “unclean...unclean.” No one would dare touch them. Max Lucado in his book, *Just Like Jesus*, suggests that the touch from Jesus was as healing as curing the disease itself.

Imagine: this man probably hadn’t had a human touch in years. He was separated from his wife and children, and from his friends; whenever anyone came near him they would run and scream “unclean...unclean.” He had no hugs, no high fives—only the label “untouchable.” Yet here comes Jesus. Now we know that Jesus could have spoken a word and the man would have been healed. But Jesus *touched* him, a touch for maybe the first time in years.

Why do you think Jesus touched him physically?

The Bible doesn’t give us that answer, but we can infer that Jesus was as concerned about this man’s emotional needs as his physical needs. The touch said, “I love you for who you are, leprosy and all.”

Let’s imagine you are leper and Jesus came and touched you. Take a few minutes and write a thank you note to Jesus. Explain how you were feeling *before* he touched you and how you feel *now*.

Most of us have never seen someone with leprosy. Few have come into contact with a life threatening, contagious disease, yet we are around untouchables every day.

Check out the story in Matthew 20:29–34 of two untouchables that Jesus touched. Read it twice and underline what Jesus said and circle what he did.

Who are some of the people in our society that people don’t like to touch or interact with?

What types of people do you have a hard time physically touching or interacting with?

Let's get personal; write the initials of people you have a hard time giving a compassionate touch to at school, home, work, or church?

Spend a few minutes praying for types of people and the names of the people you listed above. Ask God to give you a compassionate heart toward them.

Making a Difference

Day 4 Study

Johnny is still laying in the ditch and bleeding. He needs someone to stop the bleeding. Let's say we all gather around Johnny and say, "Johnny, we believe you need the bleeding stopped; we all agree that your bleeding is a problem." Yet if we just stood around and didn't do anything about it, what good would that do? The Book of James comments on this; check it out.

Read James 2:14–20.

Summarize this passage in a short paragraph.

Faith without action is _____!

Our actions should grow out of our faith. The way we interact with others and how we give should show that something is different in our lives.

Read Matthew 25:31–40. Let's do a quick review.

What is the main message in this passage?

Now read the passage again; underline the behaviors which, according to Jesus, qualify us to enter the Kingdom.

Read verse 40 again; circle who, Christ says, doing something for is the same as doing something for him.

When we are touching others compassionately, we are—in essence—ministering to Jesus.

Let's go back to our earlier example. Johnny was lying in the ditch bleeding, and we did nothing about it. If Johnny lives through it, he will probably not be willing to listen to us when we talk about living like Christ. We didn't have any compassion; we talked the talked but didn't walk the walk.

Think about this; if we are trying to share the good news with friends at school, yet they see us talking about the down and outers, gossiping about others and not wanting to be around those who aren't in the "in" crowd, can we really expect them to listen to us?

Turn back to the passage in James and read 2:19.

Who does it say believes in God? _____

Believing isn't enough; there must be faith *and* action.

Making a Difference

Day 5 Study

Suppose we have a person who is riding with us that has the most expensive bike money can buy. On top of that, this girl has all the top of the line biking apparel as well as every accessory you can imagine. On the outside she has got it all. As you come in with the ragtag bike you got a few years ago, you start to feel a little self-conscious. Your outfit is normal athletic gear, not the \$100 biking shorts and \$150 biking shirt that makes this girl look like she is ready for the Tour de France. Her bike costs more than your car. As we start to ride, you notice something—this girl can't ride. She is continually having trouble keeping up and extreme trouble maneuvering even the slightest curve. She looks awesome on the outside, but that's about it. Looks and being able to ride are two different things. Jesus dealt with a similar group of people. They looked good on the outside, but their heart was far from God. Check it out.

Read Matthew 23:1–36.

List five things Jesus condemned the Pharisees for doing to act religious?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now reread the passage and pick out three things that God admonished them to do?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Read Luke 11:37–42.

What is God more concerned with—the inside or the outside of the Pharisees? Circle one: inside or outside.

In verse 42, underline what the Pharisees did and circle what they left out.

What do you think is the main message in verse 42?

Check out Luke 18:9–14.

Which man was the Lord more pleased with?

Why?

As you study the life of Jesus, you will notice a few things about how he treated others. He always had great compassion on those who were the “down and outers” of society. He spent a great deal of time with them. On the other hand, his sharpest words and criticism were reserved for those who were considered the elite of society, the religious people. He saw through the outside of these people and into their heart. What about you? Do you focus on what is on the outside or in the heart?

People were attracted to Jesus for many reasons; perhaps most because of his compassion for them. They sensed that he loved them for who they were, they listened to his message. Even after 2000 years, nothing really has changed. People listen to our message about Christ because we love him and care about them. A message without compassion is just words. For people to hear the “good news” they must see something different about how we view them. They must see us focused on the inside, rather than the outside.

Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 by circling the number that best indicates your attitude. A *1* would indicate you usually judge people on their outward appearance. A *10* indicates you focus more on what is on the inside of people rather than the clothes they wear or the way they look. Be honest!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Challenge: Over the next 24 hours, make a conscious effort to see people for who they are on the inside rather than the outside. Ask Jesus to give you his eyes. After that time, journal your observations.

PS. How is your pledge to STW going?

Week Five
Student devotionals written by students

Day 1 Study

Title: No Room for Me

Key Verse: Mark 12: 31 “The second [most important commandment] is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

I always imagined myself as a nice person, but thinking about it now, being nice to friends is easy for anyone. I realize that many times I get edgy with people that get on my nerves, and I keep in my own group, ignoring those outside it. When I begin to think of all this, I wonder how nice I really am.

Jesus says in this verse to love my neighbor as myself. Hmm. Most the time I think of neighbor, I picture a person that lives near my house. That is true, but when I looked it up in the dictionary, neighbor also means “fellow human being.” Don’t know about you, but when I think in terms of fellow human being, that generally stretches outside my group of friends and people on my street.

Several times in my day, I get caught up in what I am doing and forget to think about anything else. Maybe I am tired and don’t feel like listening to my lab partner tell me about her problems. Maybe I’ve had a crummy day and get disrespectful when my mom asks me about it. How tired I am or what my day was like shouldn’t affect how I deal with other people, but it does. What Jesus is saying in verses 30-31 is that the most important commandments are to put God FIRST and others SECOND. There is no *me* between the two.

If you think about how God calls Christians to be His witnesses, it’s easy to see why we should be kind to our neighbors. Every time we show love to our neighbors, we are also sharing God with them. The step for us to take is to shift our focus from ourselves to others. Where is your focus? Instead of “How can I help me?” ask “How can I help others?”

Take action! The next time you don’t feel like being nice to a neighbor, do it anyway. Work with God and let Him mold you into the witness He wants you to be.

—Amanda Kapp

Day 2 Study

“Befriending Everybody”

Key Verse: Matthew 5:46-47. “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”

Ever since I was little, I’ve been extremely shy. The thought of getting up in front of a large group of people could make me cry. That didn’t help me to make friends; I was too frightened to

go up to somebody, and no one tried to approach me. Everyone had their own friends, and they didn't want to bother with the "quiet girl." I can't count how many nights I cried myself to sleep because I wasn't brave enough to initiate a friendship. I hated that! Over time, I was able to work myself out of my reserved behavior and make some friends, but I will never forget my past loneliness.

You know that God wants us to love our enemies and you already love your friends, but what about those people in-between? Like the person you see at youth meetings who keeps to himself, or that kid at your school who's really quiet. You might think, "Well, they go to church, I'm sure they're doing fine." So you never go talk to them. You never bother to see if they have any friends.

God wants us to reach out and minister to everybody, regardless of how hard it is to strike up a conversation with them. **"If you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others?"** Jesus didn't only hang out with His disciples, did He? Are *you* caught in a clique? Do you *only* hang out with certain people?

Think about it; do you try to make new or shy people comfortable, even when you don't feel like it? Are you reaching out to people who are hard to get to know?

Try to get to know the "quiet kid" in your school or church. Put yourself in their shoes. You could be fundamental in their walk with Christ. And who knows? Maybe that person is your future best friend.

—Celia Childress

Day 3 Study **I Couldn't**

Key Verse: James 1:22-24. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like."

That's great for her, but not for me.... How many times have you seen someone doing something great and thought, "Wow, but I couldn't...?"

Too many people take that view when it comes to their spiritual walk. "Jesus had words of great wisdom, the world would be better if people would do what He said," and yet, they never decide to do it themselves.

Many of my friends know about Jesus. They know who He is, they know what He is to me, and they have had the option their entire lives of choosing Him, and yet, there's that note of effort that always seems to scare them off. Living for God is not easy, and I will say that directly. Living for Satan is easy, but what does it end with? Destruction and despair.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, by C. S. Lewis, the devil writes letters to his demon nephew, Satan tells him that his “ward” can think as much as he wants about changing the sin in his life, as long as he doesn’t, because thinking about it and not doing it is utterly useless.

As long as we “deceive” ourselves and think we will “do what it says,” we are happy. But that is so stupid! As the verse says, we might as well have forgotten what we look like! And yet, how often have you not listened to the Word when you should?

Often I haven’t been very quick on responding to the Holy Spirit, but I’ll tell you from experience: throw everything else away and act when God tells you to. Is God whispering something to your heart that you haven’t put into action? Go, do it now.

—Lindsey Antonides

Day 4 Study

Title: *Looking for the Way Out*

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 10:12-13. “If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin. But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can’t stand against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in.”

Who do you ask about how to build a house? A carpenter, of course. And who exactly would be the best person to ask about how a car works? Obviously, a mechanic. But then who should you go to when you’re dealing with temptation? Someone you trust that is also dealing with temptation sounds like the likely candidate.

When writing to the church in Corinth, Paul gives a powerful reminder to everyone that none of us is so strong that we can always overcome temptation. Now, if he had just ended there, things would have seemed pretty hopeless for those of us striving to follow Christ’s example, but he didn’t. He continued to tell us that we are not alone in our temptations. There are many others out there that are experiencing temptations that are similar to the temptations that we all face everyday. So what’s the best course of action? Seek out these people. Everyone knows the saying that “two heads are better than one.” Paul is just telling us to put that into practice.

As some of us already know, even if we have someone else to help build us up and to keep us accountable, temptation can still be tough, but that’s why Paul put in the last half of verse 13, “God is faithful.” How awesome is it to know that? God has promised us that he will never allow our temptations to be something that we cannot overcome and that he will always provide a way out.

So what can we take from the advice that Paul has given to us? First, ask yourself, “What are the temptations in my life that I am struggling with?” Once you have figured this out, find someone you trust to keep you accountable (two heads are better than one). And then, trust in God and remember that He will always remain faithful. And when you’re faced with temptation, ask

yourself, “Where is the way out that God has promised to provide for me?” And once you’ve spotted it, don’t hesitate.

—Josh Boldman

Day 5 Study

Dream Marriage

Key Verse: 2 Peter 1:4-5c. “He has given us all of his rich and wonderful promises....So make every effort to apply the benefits of these promises to your life.”

What’s your dream marriage?! Would this be your dream marriage: The perfect guy or girl marries you. Your wedding is perfect. After your wedding day, you both pack your bags and head home—to separate homes. You call each other, oh, about once a month, if that, if you really need to. You call if you have a really, really bad day. Oh, and you get together on holidays to celebrate and also on your anniversary, but then you head back home—to your separate homes.

You rarely talk, just occasionally.

Sound like a good relationship?! Didn't think so....

Is this how your relationship with your Father is?! The One who created you? Your Savior who you gave your life to? The One who made the heavens and the earth? Did you get saved and then not talk to Him until Christmas? Do you only run to Him when you have a bad day and the world turns against you? Do you even talk ONCE a month? Do you read His letter to you (the Bible)? Do you even have a relationship with Him—a real relationship? How’s your communication? Do you talk to Him as much as you talk to your best friend? Or do you leave Him out in the cold until YOU want to talk?

Why not have the PERFECT relationship with Him—just like your dream marriage? I challenge you to have a dream relationship with your God! What do you have to lose, other than one AMAZING life/relationship?!...

—Erin Hostetler

Week Six
Student devotionals written by students

Day 1

Title: Excess Baggage!

Key Verse: Matthew 19:24b. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

When Jesus said this, He wasn't talking about knitting. He was making a remark that was essential to the entire human race. There are three different interpretations of this verse. The one I wish to focus on states that the camel was literal and that the needle's eye was the name of a small gate in the Jerusalem wall. What is so crucial about this gate is that it was so low that the person riding the camel had to dismount, unload any baggage, and push/pull the camel through. Why was it so hard for the rich man to enter?? Maybe it wasn't really a monetarily rich man.

I have met people with extreme pride. Not to say that we all don't struggle with pride at times, but some just exert a pride aura. Let's approach the man as being rich with pride. The reason I shall do this is because sometimes it's hard for us to get off our camels, get on our knees, and crawl through the gate.

I have a friend named Mike who has one of those pride auras. I very much desire for him to know Christ. I pray for him daily and have even wept on his shoulder for this to happen. (Don't laugh: Jesus wept). Sometimes the biggest step in faith is getting off our camel. The greatest thing happens though: we get to see the beautiful city!

If you haven't already gotten off your camel, dropped your pride, and accepted Jesus Christ as your savior, I encourage you to consider doing so! I pray that many who read this will have already made this commitment and be looking to enhance their relationship. I encourage you to take the baggage off of your camel. Sometimes it's difficult, but God takes care of it! All you have to do is dismount. Do you really want to be stuck on that hump forever?

—Mike Snyder

Day 2 Study

Title: God, others, and *then* me

Key Verse: Philippians 2:3. "Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself."

I've struggled many years with this passage, and I'm still struggling with it now. A few months ago I wrote a prayer in my journal asking God to help me follow His will through this verse: "Oh God, I need you. Life is so hard. Even though I know you are what I need to be fulfilled, I continue to turn towards worldly fulfillment, and I constantly look for human acceptance. My desperation needs to be for you, not others. Lord, I'm also searching for joy in my life, but again, my joy's basis is in worldly things. Therefore, it comes and goes. Please help me regain

reverence and awe of whom you are and confidence in who you have created me to be. Lord, please help!”

God’s opinion is more important than any human opinion, and when we “live to make a good impression on others,” our self-worth will fluctuate because we allow worldly standards to judge us. This is not God’s will for our lives. He wants us to rest easy in his arms of love concerning ourselves only with his opinion of us.

The second key is: “Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself.” This command presents a challenge. Our human nature tends to reserve the first and best for ourselves, but when we choose to think of others as “better,” we will give unselfishly and, in return, receive God’s gifts. Watch your actions and attitudes throughout the day. Do you give the best to others or take it for yourself? In your life, whose opinions are you valuing more—God’s or the world’s? Actively pursue a lifestyle according to God’s will. Check your focus daily because it is easy to slip into old habits. If your heart is torn from insensitive words or is crying out for acceptance, give up this struggle; God’s unconditional acceptance and love are waiting to give you indescribable peace.

—Michelle Deal

Day 3 Study

Title: Be Still

Key Verse: Psalms 46:10. “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

One of the things that annoys me most in others is when they’re fidgety. The person who, for the life of them, cannot simply sit still always needs something going or they start to tap their foot or twiddle their thumbs. This characteristic becomes especially annoying when you are trying to talk to them, and you can’t tell if they even care what you say because of that continual need to be doing something. And I think God often looks down on me and sees me as this fidgety child.

As he tries to get my attention and talk to me, I’m down here trying to keep up with church, youth, Bible study, praise band, school, family, etc... (none of which is a bad thing). I spend so much time doing these things that I don’t often find the time to be still. To get away from distraction (and time limits), to really spend time getting to know and form a relationship with God. Time spent exalting and simply standing in awe of the creator of the universe.

God doesn’t want us to balance the whole world; he has that totally under control. Earlier the psalmist says, “He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth...”(Psalm 46:9). There is nothing in this world that God cannot do, but from the very beginning the one thing He has desired is our companionship, that we would seek a loving relationship with Him. And when we have this kind of relationship with him, all the other 'stuff' will simply fall into place, because it will be God doing it and not us.

Take a look at your relationship with God. When you spend your time reading the Bible and praying, take a look at your motives and ask yourself why you are doing it. Is it to get that good

feeling that you've finished reading your three chapters for the night? Or to get your dose of "God" for the day? Or are you doing it with a real longing to know God better?

So now what are you gonna' do about it? Think about why you are praying, and when you do pray, spend some time being still. Find a place with no distractions and a time when you will not have to cut God short to go somewhere. Reveal things to God that you've never told him before, and ask him to show you something new about him, and then listen for it. Focus on what is truly real instead of getting wrapped up in so called "real life."

—Cheryl Baughman

Day 4 Study

Title: When God Says Go...

Key Verse: Genesis 22:8. Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son." And the two of them went on together."

Can you imagine what it would be like if God asked you to sacrifice your little brother or sister? Maybe your best friend? As much as you love them, Abraham loved his son Isaac more. God knew this, but He asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac anyway. And Abraham obeyed—well as much as God let him. Abraham had the knife poised and ready when God sent an angel to stop him.

Abraham had obedient faith. God said go and he did—on more than one occasion. When God tells us to go, or to do something, we should. No matter how much we don't want to or how impossible it might seem. Many of the teenagers that came to IYC and went on their missions trip faced the same dilemma. God said go, but where would the money come from? For some this might have been a pretty pricey trip. But by doing their part God provided, either through opportunities to raise money or just by someone helping out a little. It happened to me two years ago.

But God doesn't want this kind of obedience from us only during summer or on special trips, He wants our obedience all the time. And if we are obedient God will bless us. Because Abraham was obedient to God, God allowed his descendents to be "as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore."

If you read the stories of Abraham and Moses, you see the results of being obedient to God. But ask yourself, "Am I as obedient to God as I could be? When God tells me to go, do I go in obedient faith or do I hold back?"

Take a look at your obedience to God. If you find that you're being obedient ask God to help you to continue that way. If you find that you're missing that, ask God to help you see the areas you need to be more obedient in and to teach you how. God did say obey your parents—isn't he your Father?

—Melissa Cunningham

Day 5 Study

Can you make it?

Think of something you LOOOVE.. ya' know. Sometimes you think, "Man, I just couldn't live without THAT for a day": A favorite TV show, TV in general, AOL (IM), computer games, the radio, reading magazines, shopping, conversations, electronics (curling iron), etc.... Something you do/use on a regular basis and sometimes you feel like your day is not complete without it. Ya' got it in mind?! All right.

Now, you say you are putting God above your "earthly things." Let's find out. Let's take away all those things you love to do—*all* of them! No computers, no TVs, no radios, no singing, no dancing, no school (yay!), no reading, no church services, no Bibles... nothin'. You've got squat. Even take away those people around you—family and friends (yes, even boyfriends and girlfriends). Nothing's left but you. You're stranded alone. **Could you live or would you go insane?** Here's an important question: Is there anything left in your life? I'm guessing most of you are saying, "NO!" right away (human nature..); but you're wrong (sorry). There's still one thing left. The most IMPORTANT thing left ever. More important than your friends/family, more important than any TV shows or computer games, even more important than the Bible and Sunday church services... so what is it?

You're personal **relationship** with Jesus Christ.

Ouch, huh? Yeah, it got me, too. So imagine with me everything taken away. Ok, so that's a little hard. Go a WEEK without your FAVORITE thing to do or use! Whether it be watching TV, getting online, or using your hair dryer... go w/o it! Hard, huh? All right...then do this: Go a week (or a couple days) without and instead of doing whatever it is or using whatever it is, spend that time with GOD... taking your personal relationship with your Father a step higher! Get to know Him! Share your doubts, feelings, burdens, love, etc. with Him.... He wants to hear it **ALL** from His child!

Can't do it!? Then step back and examine your life. Are you truly living out your life for the One who really cares and really matters? Take the challenge and find out for yourself....

—Erin Hostetler

P.S. There will **not** be any computers, TVs, electronics, magazines, malls, etc. in heaven.