

DAY 7 – A SEARCH FOR CHRIST

Then these righteous ones will reply, “Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you?³⁷ Or thirsty and give you something to drink?³⁸ Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing?³⁹ When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?”⁴⁰ And the King will tell them, “I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!” (Matthew 25: 37-40)



Clearly, our treatment of others matters to our Lord. Over and over again, we are admonished to serve, to do so willingly, passionately, humbly and without judgment. Most Christians understand that it is important that others see Christ in us through our kindness and words. But we often miss the opportunity to see Christ in others. As Jesus tells about the final judgment in this section of Matthew’s Gospel, it is clear that each of those people we touch, or fail to touch, should represent to us the face of Jesus. Can we see His face in our friends and neighbors who live with HIV?

PRAYER: Lord, today I thank you for giving me the opportunity, as a believer, to work in your Kingdom. I thank you for those times that I have been a worthy disciple of yours so that others would see your heart in my words and actions. Today I pray that I would be so humble that I could be able to see you in the people that I serve; I desire to have the knowledge that your Spirit lives and works in our world, and that any time I come in contact with those in need, those who are hungry, those neighbors who are unloved and untouched by a mean-spirited world, that I would realize that in my service, I am serving you.

Where can I get more information about HIV?

HIV Resources

- Centers for Disease Control HIV Information. www.cdc.gov/hiv
- CDC Let’s Stop HIV Together Campaign/Ending HIV Stigma. www.cdc.gov/stophivtogether/
- Complete HIV/AIDS Resource. www.thebody.com/
- Positively Aware, Journal of the Test Positive Aware Network. www.tpan.com

Christianity and HIV Resources

- Samaritan Ministry, The HIV Resource for Churches Kit. www.samaritancentral.org
- AIDS: Finding Hope and Compassion (Pamphlet), RBC Ministries, www.rbc.net
- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship HIV/AIDS Ministry, www.thefellowship.info/AIDS
- United Methodist HIV/AIDS Ministry, www.umglobalaidsfund.org
- Rick & Kay Warren’s HIV/AIDS Newsletter, www.hivandthechurch.com
- Rusaw and Swanson: *The Externally Focused Church* (2004)
- D. Messer: *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence* (2004); *52 Ways to Create an AIDS Free World* (2009)



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DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

DIRECTING PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE TOWARD THE HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC

Many people ask us how they can become involved in HIV/AIDS ministry in their church or community. They have already found a place in their hearts for people who are living with HIV, yet they wonder how to translate that concern and compassion into action.

Most people feel inadequate, tentative and just don’t know where to begin. Much of the good work that has come at the hands of Christians has started with prayer. This guide is intended to help Christians focus their prayers on specific issues that can open doors to serving people in our own communities who are living with HIV. Yes, you can make a difference. Your prayers matter. Your words matter.

Within each community, there are HIV organizations that are already engaged in the important work of serving people with HIV. We also believe that in most cases, these organizations often need assistance, and Christians are uniquely qualified to serve others.

Often, it is hard for us to imagine working alongside others who don’t necessarily share our beliefs, or who are perhaps uncomfortable with Christians as partners in the first place. Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, in their wonderful book, *The Externally Focused Church*, note... “Honest, compassionate service can restore credibility to the crucial message we have to share.” We must enter into these partnerships with humility, not with haughty self-righteousness that can drive others away from us, from the church or from Christ.

We hope this guide can be a first step towards service.

Why Have An HIV/AIDS Ministry?

HIV/AIDS is still a major issue in our community today. While treatment advances have transformed HIV into a chronic manageable condition for most people and individuals with an undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit HIV (U=U: undetectable= Untransmittable), people are still becoming HIV positive, HIV stigma and discrimination persist, and some continue to die from AIDS-related complications. We want to be a part of the solution that helps to stop HIV together. We want to be prepared as a body for those affected by HIV. Many in our church community are already living with HIV, including many aging with HIV. What we have discovered is that our friends and neighbors need us and that they need to be reminded that God cares for and loves all of us.

THE MISSION

We should be a beacon of light and hope and service, by way of Christ, to anyone (self, friends or family) living with or vulnerable to acquiring HIV.

DAY 1 – A CALL TO SERVICE

Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.” (Luke 10: 37b)



Jesus made this statement at the end of the story of the Good Samaritan. Often overlooked, this directive of Jesus is a clear call to service as it answers the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Absent from this best-known illustration of our Lord is the interview. The hated Samaritan doesn’t ask any questions or make any judgments to decide the worthiness of the person in need. To the Samaritan, the wounded person is a human worthy of care. The only question HIV asks is, “Are you human?”

PRAYER: Lord, we ask You today to open our hearts to an epidemic that exists right here in our own community. It is as much an epidemic of indifference as it is one that involves a virus. We humbly ask that You drop this veil from our eyes so we may see, act and love as You have commanded us. Allow us to have the same simple love demonstrated by that stranger who saw the humanity in each other and was moved toward mercy, compassion, and service.

DAY 2 – CONFESSION

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.” And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. (Psalm 32:5)



As Christians begin to thoughtfully and prayerfully come to terms with their responsibility to serve those living with HIV, one critical roadblock remains. Instead of being the “beacon of light and hope, by way of Christ” in this epidemic, the Church has sometimes been a bastion of judgment and stigma. It has not only sinned in its failure to act, but it has also been responsible for much alienation and suffering for those affected by, or vulnerable to acquiring HIV. Clearly, the church has gotten it wrong at times when it comes to those affected by HIV.

PRAYER: Lord, we publicly confess and acknowledge that we have too often contributed to stigmatization and discrimination and that our churches have not always been welcome places for people living with HIV/AIDS. We therefore commit ourselves to a faithful and courageous response in breaking the silence, speaking openly and truthfully about human sexuality and HIV/AIDS. We confess that the church has rejected when it should have embraced and judged when it should have shown love and compassion.

DAY 3 – A CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR

The godly think before speaking; the wicked spout evil words. (Proverbs 15:28)



As we begin to change our mindset and heart and see HIV in a new way, the first challenge for us can be to change our own behavior. Here, our hateful words and our willingness to perpetuate myths and misunderstandings concerning HIV/AIDS and those living with and vulnerable to HIV must be stopped, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. We need to change the words and the conversation, alter the context, and begin to challenge the negative and judgmental attitudes that still exist toward people who are living with HIV.

PRAYER: May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:13)

DAY 4 – COMMITMENT

So you see, it isn’t enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is no faith at all – it is dead and useless. (James 2:17)



Here’s the hard part... action. How can we translate this new awareness and commitment to action? What kind of commitment are we willing to make with our time, talents, and energy to change people’s lives? Can we make a difference? For many, the first step is to learn more about HIV because knowledge is the first step toward reducing prejudice and stigma. The second bold step in our commitment is to call one of the local organizations already serving the HIV/AIDS population and offer to learn and help.

PRAYER: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Place in my path opportunities to serve so that I might make a difference in the lives of those living with HIV. Lord, when the opportunity presents itself, give me the will and confidence to be the presence of Christ in my community. Use me to serve others.

DAY 5 – COURAGE

God arms me with strength. He has made my way safe. (Psalm 18:32)



It takes courage to begin to talk about HIV. Period! This is a conversation most don’t want to have, and that is certainly the case in the church setting. It takes courage to speak against hatred and prejudice and to speak up for people living with HIV. But when our efforts, words, and deeds are clearly focused on service, God’s love and the message in John 3:16, we can truly ask, “What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Courageous leaders, lay people, and clergy must step forward. With this virus, fearful silence fuels stigma and stigma kills.

PRAYER: Our Father, we know that we can do all things because of Your strength. We pray today for the strength, discernment and courage to speak up for those members of our community who may not have a voice. Help us to speak against the ugly and demeaning rhetoric that is all too often part of the Christian vocabulary when it comes to HIV. May faithful people see in me an open heart and an unconditional love that spills out sufficiently to cover all of God’s creation.

DAY 6 – COMMUNITY

Be careful how you live among your unbelieving neighbors. Even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will believe and give honor to God when he comes to judge the world. (1 Peter 2:12)



This is a simple but important message from Peter that is often overlooked: our work as Christians ALWAYS occurs within the community we live in. Too often, we isolate ourselves from the community. In addressing HIV, our allies may include Health Departments and other non-religious groups. Ending the HIV/AIDS epidemics requires all of us working together.

PRAYER: Father, please help me understand that my community role demands that I love and embrace my entire community as part of Your Kingdom. Help me to be humble with You. Help me see in others the talents that You have given them that make them great partners with us in this work. Let my presence at the table be Your presence, my words be Your words. Let my work with others be a model of humility and respect.