

## Too Close to Ignore

You've been there. Suddenly a person near you comes into focus that is obviously in need of help. Quickly your mind begins to rattle off your options – shift your gaze; turn around; walk away; ignore them. But what if they are too close to ignore? What then?

That is what this little devotional is all about. What to do when someone in need is too close to ignore.

### Day 1 Accept, reject or ignore?

*At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth . . . Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.*

Luke 1:39-40,56 (NIV)

How do you handle things when a friend or family member crosses forbidden boundaries? From the outside looking in, Mary had crossed one that could have led to her death...she was pregnant and not married. Yet Elizabeth, her aunt, gladly welcomed her into her home, not just overnight, but for three months.

Some things to ponder...

1. What keeps you from looking beyond the taboo to see the person involved?
2. Identify three steps you can take to reveal hidden prejudice and eradicate it.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.

### Day 2 Who is the enemy?

*After they [Paul and Silas] had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent*

*earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"*

Acts 16:23-28 (NIV)

Have you ever judged another person when they were simply doing their job? It is easy to fall into that trap, but there is a way out. Paul and Silas found it by focusing on God in prayer and singing praises to His name. Doing so helped them see the jailor in a different light and they were able to share their good news with him (vv 29-30).

Some things to ponder...

1. How can you mentally "take a breath" before jumping to conclusions about another person's motives or actions?
2. Will you commit to pray for them rather than judge them?

### **Day 3 What kind of friend are you?**

*When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.*

Job 2:11-13 (NIV)

There are friends, and then there are "real" friends. When Job's friends heard about his troubles, they dropped everything and came to be with him. For seven days they said nothing; they just shared with Job in his suffering.

Some things to ponder...

1. Would you go sit with a friend to provide a "ministry of presence" or would you leave that for others to do?

2. What roadblocks keep you from giving of yourself to your friends?

#### **Day 4 Will you share what you have?**

*So he [Elijah] went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."*

*"As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread--only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."*

1 Kings 17:10-12 (NIV)

Most people are taught about the need to share at an early age. However, there are times when sharing is just not possible, or at least very difficult. Sometimes it is simply because we don't want to share!

The widow and her son had good reason not to share—they only had enough food for one last meal. However, read the rest of the story and see how God blessed their generosity (vv 13-16).

Some things to ponder...

1. What makes it difficult or impossible for you to share?
2. Will you ask God to help you next time the opportunity to help arises?

#### **Day 5 What about giving money?**

*After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*

Luke 8:1-3 (NIV)

Money. Most of us don't like to talk about it, especially when we know that someone else needs or wants it. In fact, sometimes it seems like everyone has their hand out wanting a donation for some "worthy cause."

The truth is that money is nothing more than a tool to be used to accomplish things. Hoarding it does no good and wasting it does no good. However, investing money in the right places does lots of good.

Some things to ponder...

1. What is money to you (i.e., success, wealth, status, etc.)?
2. How can you overcome your reluctance to invest in the right people or causes?

## **Day 6 Are you hungry?**

*...It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. . . . Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.*

John 21:1a-3,12-13 (NIV)

The disciples had fished all night and caught no fish. At sunrise, they saw a man on the shore who called out to them about their success. Then he suggested they try fishing on the other side of the boat, after which they hauled in a great catch (vv 4-6). Knowing they were hungry he offered to feed them.

Have you ever worked and labored over a task only to accomplish nothing? It probably felt good when you were called to come inside for supper and you could leave your task behind for a while; weary souls need time to refresh.

Some things to ponder...

1. When you see someone who is weary are you willing to help them refresh?
2. Try this... The next time an opportunity arises to encourage someone who is weary, do it.

## Day 7 Who needs help?

*The king asked, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?"*

*Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet."*

*"Where is he?" the king asked.*

*Ziba answered, "He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar."*

*So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.*

*When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.*

*David said, "Mephibosheth!"*

*"Your servant," he replied.*

*"Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."*

*2 Samuel 9:3-7 (NIV)*

King David understood the importance of helping others. In this case, he wanted to help a member of the former king's family if any were left alive.

How about you? Do you know of anyone who could use your long-term help? Maybe an elderly person could use your help with chores around the house or yard work. You may know of a teacher who could use your help in the classroom. Look around. You will find them.

Some things to ponder...

1. Do you shy away from helping people who are handicapped, chronically ill or elderly? Why?
2. Will you commit to begin helping someone whom you know so their load will be lightened?

## Day 8 Will you do whatever it takes?

*So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*

Exodus 17:10-13 (NIV)

Leadership requires strength, dedication and sacrifice. Moses quickly saw that he played a key role in the battle that required he hold his hands in the air. You should try it and see how many hours you can do it without growing weary. Well, Moses was weary as well, but the cost was too great to give in to fatigue, so Aaron and Hur stepped up to do whatever it took to keep Moses' arms upraised.

When you see your supervisor or church leader growing weary, do you quickly move to their side to help them or do you stand back and complain about their inability to do a good job? Though it may not be apparent, your action or inaction may be key to the success or failure of the endeavor.

Some things to ponder...

1. Will you humble yourself to stand beside a leader to help them when they become weary?
2. Are you willing to do whatever it takes to help them?

## Day 9 Who is looking after them?

*But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.*

*So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word."*

*Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.*

Acts 6:1-6 (NLT)

Jesus said the poor would always be among us (Mark 14:7). With that being the case, somebody must look after them. Who is that “somebody?” Could it be you?

Some things to ponder...

1. When you see a need do you step in to meet it? If not, why?
2. Will you commit to seek out opportunities to serve others?

#### **Day 10 Who are the weak among you?**

*I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Acts 20:33-35 (NIV)

Apostle Paul was a champion of the weak. He always looked out for those who were in need and worked to help provide for them. He chose not to be a burden to those who followed him, but instead taught them the value of hard work.

Whether you realize it or not, you lead by example. People look to you to see what you are doing and how you handle certain situations. This comes with the territory of being human.

Some things to ponder...

1. What kind of an example do you set that you want others to see and follow?
2. Are you willing to work at being the kind of example people will follow?

#### **Day 11 Would you like to stay here tonight?**

*By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them.*

Luke 24:28-30 (NLT)

Kindness to a stranger, even a familiar stranger, goes beyond helping a friend. These men knew that it was dangerous for a traveler to be alone on the road at night, so they offered him a place to stay. They were immediately blessed when they realized that it was Jesus, whom they thought had been killed (vv 31).

You may have stopped alongside the road to help a motorist who needed some assistance, or offered to help carry grocery bags to a person's car for them. These acts of kindness are valuable as they help bolster your confidence to even greater acts.

Some things to ponder...

1. What is the greatest act of kindness you can think of?
2. How can you prepare yourself to carry it out an act of kindness when the opportunity arises?

## **Day 12 Are you too weak to carry it?**

*As they led Jesus away, a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, happened to be coming in from the countryside. The soldiers seized him and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.*

Luke 23:26 (NLT)

Sometimes people are too weak to carry their own load, like Jesus was in the passage above. The soldiers told a man to carry Jesus' load, with him not knowing how it would impact his life. Today, Christians everywhere know of Simon of Cyrene.

Simon didn't ask for such notoriety, it came to him through an opportunity to serve. You may have that same kind of opportunity waiting in your future. Will you be present for it?

Some things to ponder...

1. Do you make yourself available when opportunities to help others arise?



2. If not, what attitudes need to be adjusted to open your heart and mind to seize those opportunities?

### **Day 13 Will you feed them?**

*Then Jesus called his disciples and told them, "I feel sorry for these people. They have been here with me for three days, and they have nothing left to eat. I don't want to send them away hungry, or they will faint along the way."*

*The disciples replied, "Where would we get enough food here in the wilderness for such a huge crowd?"*

*Jesus asked, "How much bread do you have?"*

*They replied, "Seven loaves, and a few small fish."*

*So Jesus told all the people to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, thanked God for them, and broke them into pieces. He gave them to the disciples, who distributed the food to the crowd.*

*They all ate as much as they wanted. Afterward, the disciples picked up seven large baskets of leftover food.*

Matthew 15:32-37 (NLT)

Compassion moved Jesus to tell His disciples to feed the multitude. His heart was inclined toward other people to the point that it did not matter what was instantly available, they simply needed to be fed. Jesus was focused on the people; the disciples were focused on supplies.

Where is your focus? Are you focused on the people or your lack? Jesus knew that the lack would be supplied so long as His focus remained upon the people. When all was said and done, seven baskets of fragments were leftover.

Some things to ponder...

1. Do you expend more energy counting "loaves and fishes" than in creative ways to use them helping others?
2. What can you do today to become more focused on other people?

### **Day 14 Will you forgive your brother?**

*“Come closer to me,” Joseph said to his brothers. They came closer. “I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt. But don’t feel badly, don’t blame yourselves for selling me. God was behind it. God sent me here ahead of you to save lives . . . . I’ll go and tell Pharaoh, ‘My brothers and my father’s family, all of whom lived in Canaan, have come to me. The men are shepherds; they’ve always made their living by raising livestock. And they’ve brought their flocks and herds with them, along with everything else they own.’ That way he’ll let you stay apart in the area of Goshen...”*

Genesis 45:4-5; 46:31-32,34b (MSG)

Joseph understood a key principle that carried him throughout his life – forgiveness. When the worst was repeatedly done to him, he was always quick to forgive and sought to discover the blessing of God in what had happened.

Some points to ponder...

1. Are you quick to forgive, or do you hold grudges?
2. Will you commit to this? Make a list of whom you know that you need to forgive. Ask Jesus to help you, and then forgive them.

## **Day 15 Whose child is this?**

*Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.*

*When the child grew older, she [his mother] took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.”*

Exodus 2:5-6, 10 (NIV)

Castaway children stand in danger of becoming just another part of the landscape, invisible unless you take the time to look...and then to care. Pharaoh’s daughter could well have given the baby to a Hebrew family and thought nothing more about him, but instead she took him into her heart.

Some things to ponder...

1. Will you spend some time looking around you to see the invisible people who are there?
2. Will you dare to care for a castaway?

#### **Day 16 Will you get involved?**

*Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters who came as usual to draw water and fill the water troughs for their father's flocks. But some other shepherds came and chased them away. So Moses jumped up and rescued the girls from the shepherds. Then he drew water for their flocks.*

Exodus 2:16-17 (NLT)

Moses was sensitive toward people who were oppressed by stronger forces. So sensitive, in fact, the reason he was at the well was because he intervened to stop the abuse of a slave and then ran away when things spiraled out of control. This notwithstanding, when he saw abuse again, he stepped in to help.

Some things to ponder...

1. Have you ever tried to help someone and then found yourself in a mess because of it?
2. Like Moses, are you willing to step in to help again when the situation warrants it?

#### **Day 17 Will you share your wisdom?**

*The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening? . . . What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice...select capable men from all the people..."*

Exodus 18:13-14,17-19a,21 (NIV)

Moses' father-in-law saw very quickly that disaster was looming if Moses did not change his ways. Without any hesitation, he pointed out what was happening, what would happen and how to correct the problem before it escalated. His wisdom was not shared in a condescending or critical manner, but was instead instructional. Moses listened and then implemented the

advice received and thus set in place a primary governing structure that Israel would use for centuries to come.

Some things to ponder...

1. Wisdom is gained through the myriad of your life experience. Are you willing to mine the riches of your wisdom to share with others?
2. If not, what prevents you from doing so? What steps will you take to overcome it?

### **Day 18 Will you stay or will you leave?**

*Naomi [said], "Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to marry again."*

*But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!"*

Ruth 1:11-12,16-17 (NLT)

Ruth was completely loyal to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Though all of their husbands were dead, Ruth chose to remain by Naomi's side, no matter the cost.

Loyalty is often lacking these days. Businesses often demand loyalty from staff, but then demonstrate disloyalty through their behavior. For some, loyalty is only as thick as a dollar bill, so the higher the stack the longer they are "loyal."

Some things to ponder...

1. What influences your loyalty?
2. Would you be willing to stay with no guarantees?

### **Day 19 Will you leave anything behind?**

*Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields. Stay right behind the young women working in my field. See which part of the field they are harvesting, and*

*then follow them. I have warned the young men not to treat you roughly. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well."*

*When Ruth went back to work again, Boaz ordered his young men, "Let her gather grain right among the sheaves without stopping her. And pull out some heads of barley from the bundles and drop them on purpose for her. Let her pick them up, and don't give her a hard time!"*

Ruth 2:8-9,15-16 (NLT)

Gleaning the fields during harvest was established by God while the Israelites were still in the wilderness. This practice ensured that the poor would have a way to gather food and thus help prevent starvation. Boaz took the additional step of allowing Ruth to glean among the sheaves and ordered his harvesters to deliberately pull heads from the stalks and leave them for her and Naomi.

Today the practice of gleaning is an all-but-forgotten practice of antiquity, but gleaning of a different kind still persists. Some construction companies allow people to glean surplus building materials and scrap to either sell or use, thus continuing a long-standing practice of helping the poor.

Some things to ponder...

1. What kind of things could you "leave behind" for others to glean?
2. How can you assist others in their gleaning?

## **Day 20 Will you expose wrongdoing?**

*So the king and Haman went to dinner with Queen Esther. At this second dinner, while they were drinking wine the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what would you like? Half of my kingdom! Just ask and it's yours."*

*Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your eyes, O King, and if it please the king, give me my life, and give my people their lives.*

*"We've been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed—sold to be massacred, eliminated. If we had just been sold off into slavery, I wouldn't even have brought it up; our troubles wouldn't have been worth bothering the king over."*

*King Xerxes exploded, "Who? Where is he? This is monstrous!"*

*"An enemy. An adversary. This evil Haman," said Esther.*

Esther 7:1-6a (MSG)

Esther, at the risk of losing her life, exposed an evil plot to destroy her people, the Jews. Having been told by her uncle that maybe she was born for this purpose alone, she gathered her courage and spoke the truth.

Some things to ponder...

1. How far would you go to expose wrongdoing?
2. Are you aware of anything now that should be brought to light?

#### **Day 21 Will you encourage others during the storm?**

*Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. Altogether there were 276 of us on board. When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.*  
Acts 27:33-38 (NIV)

Paul was confident that he and his shipmates would survive shipwreck if they listened and obeyed God. When things seemed the bleakest during the storm, he encouraged everyone to eat in order to help build their strength. Paul knew the ship was going to sink and he knew that everyone would survive, but right then they needed to eat.

Some points to ponder...

1. Are you willing to risk everything to help other people succeed?
2. Are you willing to stand in the face of fierce opposition and encourage your teammates?

#### **Day 22 Will you guard another's flock?**

*One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were a wall*

*around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them.”*

1 Samuel 25:14-16 (NIV)

“You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.” This kind of looking out for one another has been going on since the beginning of time. Unfortunately, however, some folks will not reciprocate and will, instead, demand justice if the other party asks for something in return.

Kindness done for kindness sake asks for and expects nothing in return, not even a “Thank you.” However, too often when a kindness is done something is expected.

Some things to ponder...

1. When you help another person, do you expect something in return?
2. What can you give right now to another person in need and have no expectation of return?

Throughout this study, we have talked about how to help those people near you who are in need. Remember, when you help someone or lend a hand, you must do it with no expectation of receiving anything in return. Helping is not a job that pays. It is a gift that is given.