

7-day devotional for the global refugee crisis

Humanitarian crisis, poverty, war, famine; there are a lot of unsettling things in this world. While the solutions aren't always clear to us, God's Word can be a frequent reminder that everything is under God's control and that in the end, he will bring justice to all who have been oppressed.

Getting the most from God's Word

As you embark on this journey, we encourage you to engage with God's Word following these four steps so that your life may be touched and changed in the most meaningful way.

Pray with focus and openness to see what God has for you. God, connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word.

Read the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of intriguing words and phrases. Read them a second time.

Reflect on what strikes you as you read. What does this passage of Scripture teach you about God's values?

Respond to the passage. Speak to God directly about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

This devotional is an excerpt from the InspireJustice 365-Day Devotional.

Day 1 Peace

Pray: *God connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word.*

Read: Psalm 120.6-7 – Ever felt on your own? Ever felt as though no one was listening to you? Ever felt despised and ignored? Welcome to the world of the peacemaker. Often it seems as if violence is the only solution the world trusts. We are quick to resort to violence, always looking for the opportunity to lash out, launch missiles, or blow up innocent bystanders. Of course, sometimes evil must be resisted and the vulnerable protected by force. But that has to be a last resort, not an immediate response. We should look for peaceful solutions. This is not weakness; arguing for peace is hard work. Take the writer of this psalm: he's tired, he's disillusioned; he's lived too long among these people. He just can't take it anymore. "Love your enemies," says Jesus (Matthew 5.43-45). "Do your best to live at peace with everyone," says Paul (Romans 12.18). So we keep on going. Where there is conflict – in our world, in our communities, in our homes – the Christian way is to talk, to bring people together, to understand and, if possible, address grievances. We must speak out for peace among people who often speak only of war. It's a tough struggle. Peace, ironically, is worth fighting for, but not only with guns.

Reflect: Where in your community is peace needed most? Where in the larger world? How can you help bring it about? Ask God.

Respond: Use the Internet or read a book to find out how peacemakers work. What qualities are needed to be a successful peacemaker? Lord, I want to be your child and to live at peace with people, encouraging others to do the same. Help me to be full of kindness and truth.

To know more: Psalm 120.6-7; Psalm 20; 2 Chronicles 20.1-29

Day 2 Immigrants

Pray: *God connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word.*

Read: Jeremiah 22.1-5 –The court during Jeremiah's time was a place of oppression and inequality. King Jehoiakim forced the people to pay higher taxes (2 Kings 23.35).The burden fell heavily on the most marginalised – widows, orphans, and the foreigners in the land. But God had given rules on the fair treatment of refugees and immigrants. They were to be treated with kindness (Leviticus 19.33-34); fairness (Leviticus 24.22); care and support (Leviticus 25.35-37); and equality (Numbers 9.14). Now, conveniently, the king and his court were forgetting God's commands, forgetting how their ancestors had similarly once been an exploited immigrant labour force in Egypt. What do we forget about refugees? That they are individuals, loved by God; that our actions as a nation have helped create imbalances of power that result in a world where some people end up becoming refugees? Do we, too, forget God's Words?

Reflect: You've been granted an audience with the highest authority in the land. You have 15 minutes to speak your mind. What are you going to say?

Respond: Pray for groups in your community who welcome and support widows, orphans, immigrants, refugees, and victims of violence. Find out where in your community special services are offered to immigrants (such as learning English, becoming acclimated to the community, etc.) and befriend someone new to your neighbourhood. Lord, you see and hear everything; you instruct the nations and give knowledge to help us all. Correct us, teach us, bless us.

To know more: Jeremiah 22.1-5; Exodus 5; Deuteronomy 24.10-22

Day 3 Food

Pray: *God connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word.*

Read: Leviticus 19.9,10 – It's one of those parental clichés: "Eat your dinner! People are starving in India/Africa/China/ some other place." But like most clichés, it contains a spoonful of truth. Every year, Australians waste an average of \$8billion of food. Just think of it. The food we place in our shopping carts or what we order in restaurants will never see the inside of our stomachs. It will be scraped into trash cans or will just sit in a dark corner of the fridge until, years beyond its use-by date, it starts to evolve into an entirely new life form. Leviticus shows us a different way to deal with unwanted food. It was not to be wasted, but put to good use. Jesus collected leftovers too – presumably so they could be given away. Our parents were right. People are starving around the world. So, eat your greens.

Reflect: What is God asking you to leave behind for the poor? A portion of your pay-cheque? Your food? Your time?

Respond: Give thanks at every meal and finish your greens. Take an inventory of the contents of your fridge and plan how you're going to use them. Invite someone to dinner who may have trouble making ends meet. Find out what it costs to feed a family for a week in another part of the world. Send that amount to a charity that provides food for that country. Rain on the hills, grass for cattle, plants for our food, grain for our health, oil for our skin, and sweet fruit to cheer us up. All this comes from you, Lord God, for all of us to share.

To know more: Leviticus 19.9-10; Ruth 1-2

Day 4 Water

Pray: *God connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word.*

Read: Isaiah 41.17-20 – Planet Earth could be renamed Planet Water. Although 75 percent of the Earth's surface is water, only one percent is drinkable. Nations battle to keep this resource themselves, building huge reservoirs and constructing dams to divert it for their own needs. Even at home, drought restrictions remind us to think carefully about our use of this precious substance. In this passage from Isaiah, God promises water: the barren desert will burst forth with growth. The prophet's words show the importance of water and the difference it can make in people's lives. Lack of water – or being forced to drink unhealthy water – is the biggest single cause of disease and death in the world today. Giving people clean water allows them to flourish. Crops can be grown, communities can be developed, families can bathe and children, who otherwise would spend all day finding water, have a chance to get an education. Water can bring life to barren lives just as it can cause the desert to bloom.

Reflect: All over the world, dry land becomes lush and green; everyone is clean and healthy; every child is in school. How did that happen?

Respond: Find out how you can conserve water in your household. Drink. Wash. Flush. Every time you use water, give thanks. You, Lord, can turn deserts into lakes and scorched land into flowing streams. Help us work with you to channel water towards people who desperately need it.

To know more: Isaiah 41.17-20; Exodus 17.1-7; John 4.1-42

Day 5 Literacy

Pray: *God connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word.*

Read: Luke 10.25-28 – “What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?” asks Jesus (10.26). Or in other versions, “How do you read it?” Of course, to read the Scriptures right – to read anything right – first you have to be able to read. Poverty and illiteracy go hand in hand. The poor, the homeless and refugees have difficulty accessing education. Not being able to read, write or count means more than missing out on the latest best-seller. It means not being able to get a decent job. It means that you are vulnerable to being cheated. It means that you cannot easily claim things to which you have a right. Don't just think “overseas” either. Illiteracy is rampant in industrialised nations, particularly in prisons where there is a huge link between criminal behaviour and lack of literacy skills. God wrote down his commandments for Moses. Jesus read and quoted the Scriptures. No one needs to be able to read to meet Jesus, but think about what they are missing! Don't you think Jesus would like people to be able to read about him?

Reflect: Remember your own experience of learning to read. Imagine every child in the world being able to read and write in his or her own language.

Respond: You're reading this, so perhaps you could help someone else learn to read: at school or a local library, at home, or at church. How many different ways can you find to give away books? Consider underwriting the cost of a student's textbooks, pencils and other school supplies. Lord, turn me into a lifelong student of your Word.

To know more: Luke 10.25-28; Deuteronomy 11; Joshua 1.1-9; 8.30-35

Day 6 Home

Pray: *God connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word.*

Read: Luke 2.5-12 – Ah, Christmas! Think of the Christmas cards with the cozy stable, well-behaved animals, adoring shepherds and worshipping wise men. Except the word usually translated as “inn” (verse 7) is the Greek word *kataluma* – which can also mean guest room or upper chamber. So, forget the first-century hotel, forget the grumpy innkeeper. It was in a very difficult, very harsh reality that God’s son made his entrance on the world’s stage: a peasant house where animals were kept and fed inside the home alongside the family. Joseph and his teenage bride stayed in a home so cramped that there was no room upstairs with the rest of their host’s family; the only place to lay the baby was downstairs in the animals’ feed box. A small town in Palestine, a peasant’s home, a helpless baby in the animal’s feeding trough. The newborn Son of God is asleep.

Reflect: Think of the images you’ve seen of sick babies and desperate mothers in run-down villages or refugee settlements. Now picture them in your house with all the comforts that you enjoy. Why shouldn’t they have what you have?

Respond: Find out if there’s a church or community sponsored event near you that raises funds for the homeless. Sign-up and put the date in your calendar. Prepare a meal or provide entertainment at a homeless shelter. Ride along in a van that delivers meals, clothing and blankets to homeless people who don’t wish to go to a shelter. Offer them your prayers and friendship. Lord, do you see the plight of those who are without a home? See how their lives are ebbing away. Please find them a place where they can settle. Thank you for your unfailing love and the wonderful things you do.

To know more: Luke 2.5-12; Leviticus 25; Psalm 84

Day 7 Passion

Pray: *God connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word.*

Read: Amos 3.13-4.3 – The prophets didn’t pull any punches. If you see God as a reasonable, easy-going sort of person, then read the words he gave his prophets! They burn the tongue and blister the mouth. Old Testament prophets could be direct and blunt. The part of Samaria that Amos describes was prosperous and famous for its agriculture. Here the cows are not in the fields, but in the homes! The people live like cattle, without any spiritual dimension. It’s almost an animal existence. But destruction is on its way. The Assyrians are coming, and they have a taste for beef. So God gives them a blast. It’s the prophetic equivalent of a cattle-prod. So, is it OK to be outraged? Is it right to be rude? Only the passionate use of impassioned language. God gets angry because He cares. Sometimes tough language is the only language that will be heard. God needs to shock people out of their complacency and, occasionally, we all need a poke to get us moving in the right direction.

Reflect: Have you ever become angry about injustice? What did you do? Would it be appropriate to use tough language?

Respond: Read your way around the world in 80 days: pick up a magazine article or click on a website – a different country each day. Reflect on what you’ve learned about the needs of the poor and needy in three months’ time. You, Lord God, are not pleased with acts of injustice. Give me the courage to speak with boldness your word of truth.

To know more: Amos 3.13-4.3; 2 Kings 13.10-25