

Our Children Deserve Better

Changing Our World Through Godly Character

Devotionals by Sharon Stults

In my early elementary years, we started school days with the same two traditions. We all pledged allegiance to the American flag and then a teacher or administrator prayed. This was normal in most American classrooms at that time. During my 2nd grade year, the prayer disappeared.

I'm sure my family talked about it around our dinner table a time or two, because we always discussed current events. Beyond that, I don't remember any groups of angry parents or teachers. No memories of my pastor bringing it up from the pulpit or my Sunday School teachers discussing it in classes. I'm not saying people weren't upset at that time but not enough to create a memory in my young mind.

I asked my parents many years later why they and other Christians didn't raise a ruckus about this issue, at the time. They said, "Well, we figured, public schools are run by the government and they can do pretty much what they want." I'm not sure how many generations back we can trace this kind of disconnect of not understanding that we, the people are the government. For the moral health of our culture, it's been a tragic misunderstanding.

In my post, Wisdom Challenge #14, "God- Followers Can Be Purifying Agents in A Polluted Culture," I share many suggestions for becoming a change agent for goodness and righteousness. I believe we are in a season where God is judging and removing wicked people in places of power, not just in government but in business, media, entertainment and even the church. Yes, the church. We will need righteous people with wise, godly characters to fill those positions. You may be one of them.

My prayer is that these devotionals will challenge and provoke you to consider the areas where God may be trying to shape and change you to conform more to the image of Christ. As we consider dynamic character qualities of people from the past, I believe we will be more motivated to submit to the inner workings of God in us. I want God to use you and me to impact our worlds as they did, because our children deserve better.

Learning together in him,

Sharon

Boldness – William Tyndale

The Verse: “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion,”
Proverbs 28:1 ESV.

The Story: Imagine your Bible written in a language you couldn’t understand. All you would know about scripture is what pastors preached. That describes 16th century England during William Tyndale’s lifetime when the Bible was primarily in Latin. Only the elite educated could read it. English law existed that prohibited printing a Bible in “common” languages.

Tyndale, a Protestant Reformer, wanted the scriptures accessible to everyone. He once said to a priest, “If God spares my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost.” Tyndale boldly declared his intentions to translate and print an English Bible. This put him on the hit list of church authorities and King Henry the VIII.

Tyndale did translate the Bible, but how did he print and distribute it without being arrested? With support from wealthy patrons and British sea merchants, he published 6,000 English Bibles in Germany and then smuggled them into England. They created such a stir, the king sent agents all over Europe to hunt for Tyndale and arrest him. Bishops and priests bought copies to burn them. Despite the danger, Tyndale kept printing and smuggling for years.

Finally, a false friend betrayed Tyndale’s location. He was arrested and imprisoned for 18 months. After being tried and convicted of heresy, on October 6, 1536 he was strangled and then burned at the stake. His last words were, “God, open the eyes of the King of England.”

William Tyndale impacted not only the culture of his day but future generations as well. The Tyndale translation forms about 68% of the King James translation. His boldness opened the doorway for millions of people to read scripture for themselves. The price he paid for that godly boldness was life as an exile and death as a martyr.

The Challenge: Boldness for God is costly. Consequently, we might be hesitant to step up to his calling for us. Gideon was. Moses was. Just as God changed and empowered them, he can do the same for us, *if we will let him*. Our children deserve champions with the boldness of William Tyndale, people who will relentlessly pursue godly causes. Are we willing to let God do his work in us?

“Christ is with us til world’s end. Let his little flock be bold therefore.”

William Tyndale

Courage- Jim Eliot

The Verses: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go,” Joshua 1:9-11 NIV.

“If you cling to your life, you will lose it, and if you let your life go, you will save it”. Luke 17:33

The Story: On the last day of his life, missionary Jim Eliot’s primary thoughts were only about communicating the gospel to the violent Auca (Waodoni) tribe of Ecuador. Known to be hostile, Jim still believed God called him to share the gospel with them. That day, Jim and four other missionaries flew into the jungle to make their second contact, with hope that Aucas would come out of and interact face to face, as they did on their first flight in.

Back home in the United States, some did not see Jim as courageous. With his charismatic speaking gifts, they believed his gifts were wasted in Ecuador’s jungles. He should have pastored a large church or reached crowds as an evangelist. Others, familiar with Ecuador and the violence of these unreached tribes, thought him to be a fool. Before Jim’s adventures in Ecuador, he developed the courage to face critics. Sometimes it can be harder to stand up for what we believe in with people who know us. Jim never faltered. God planted an undeniable love for the Aucas in his heart.

Sadly, one of the tribesmen the missionaries met on their first trip lied to the rest of the tribe about the motives of the Americans. Previously, an American oil company tried to displace the Aucas and harassed them terribly. When the missionaries landed and stepped out onto the jungle clearing again, ten Auca warriors ambushed them. On January 8, 1956, at the age of 28, Jim Eliot along with four other brave missionaries was slaughtered on a remote riverbank in the Ecuadorian jungle. Murdered by the very ones whom God placed in Jim’s heart.

Days of silence passed before the missionary’s families found out what happened to Jim and the others. Searching for and identifying the bodies didn’t end until January 13.

Perhaps Jim’s critics back home quietly felt vindicated. The gospel still had not penetrated the Auca tribe. Five precious lives sacrificed for nothing. That was not the end of this story, though. Through more sacrifice and courage from Jim’s wife, Betty, and others, the message of God’s love reached the Auca Indians. Hear the [story here](#). All of it began with Jim’s decision to lay down an easier life and follow God’s call into a dangerous one.

The Challenge: Is God trying to grow courage in you and me, so we can share our faith with people right around us who are hostile to God-followers and the message of Christ? It’s always our choice to cooperate. Or not. I believe if we step out in faith, he’ll change fearful to courageous.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Jim Eliot

Compassion- Mark and Huldah Buntain

The Verse: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” Matthew 9:36 NLT.

The Story: After returning to the states following five years with her missionary parents in Japan, young Huldah vowed she’d never live overseas again. Falling in love with Mark Buntain, an evangelist, challenged that vow just a few years later. In 1954, Mark and Huldah had only been married a couple years and become parents for the first time when Mark received a call to preach at a church in Calcutta, India for a year. The thought of bringing a newborn to a city known for its poverty and filth set Huldah back and the couple argued about whether to take the call. Eventually, Mark won Huldah over with a profound question. “Who else will go?”

After three months at sea and fresh ocean air, the sights and sounds of 1954 downtown Calcutta assaulted the young couple’s senses. Businessmen and women brushed past filthy children playing with scrap metal and garbage, while their mothers sat on curbs nursing their infants. Sewage ran down the sides of many of the streets. Open air markets were dotted throughout the city with fly-covered meat next to exotic fruits, vegetables, and spices.

Emaciated homeless people, were sprawled on sidewalks, everywhere. The healthy stepped over and around them. As young parents, the most shocking sight for the Buntains were the hundreds of deformed children, with severe cataracts and cleft palates.

This display of human suffering and misery would be a culture shock for anyone from Western culture. For their year of service, many might choose to avoid the worst parts of Calcutta and confine themselves to the neighborhoods of their ministry assignment. Not the Buntains.

Moved by compassion, for those 365 days, Mark and Huldah not only faithfully served their assigned church, but they also created a catalogue of human needs for the city of Calcutta. Through letters they pleaded with people back home to help them meet some of those needs with finances, short term missionary service and prayers. Somebody needed to do something. Someone needed to care about the poorest of poor in Calcutta.

At the end of the twelve months, the Buntains realized that Calcutta had become home. The masses of poor, diseased and dying no longer shocked them. Instead, these precious people had entwined themselves into Mark and Huldah’s hearts. They could not leave them.

The couple started several bold initiatives and in 1964 opened their very first school for 200 children. In 1989, tragedy struck, and Mark died suddenly of a brain hemorrhage while Huldah was visiting family in the states. Grief and feelings of inadequacy could have kept her there. Compassion and mercy brought her back to India where she went on to develop the extensive outreach of Calcutta Mercy Ministries. Today this ministry serves thousands in Calcutta.

The Challenge: Compassion is often needed the most in the places that are most likely to repel us. We are faced with the choice of staying in safe places or stepping into need.

“Going doesn't count unless love motivates you. Loving doesn't count unless doing demonstrates.” Huldah Buntain

Faith- George Muller

The Verse: “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer,” Matthew 21:22 NIV.

The Story: Arrogant. Gambler. Drunkard. Regularly skipped out on bills. The early life of George Muller gave no hint of the man of faith he would become. When God took hold of George’s heart, the transformation was radical. He emptied his library of all books, except for the Bible. He became a pastor but refused a salary, the first step of growing his faith muscles. Prayer and faith in God’s ability to provide kept his family fed, clothed, and housed.

In George’s hometown of Bristol, England, thousands of orphans were homeless or forced into workhouses where they became slave labor. George and his wife, Mary, began taking girls home, in 1836, and rented little houses for them to live in. They dreamed of building a proper orphanage where children could be nurtured and taught God’s Word.

George refused to go to men for donations but instead prayed daily for eighteen months that God would bring in funds needed to build a beautiful orphanage with every amenity. \$100,000 was received simply through prayer. That’s fourteen million, in today’s dollars.

Maintaining the orphanage and feeding and clothing the children became an ongoing faith walk for George and Mary. One night, Mary rushed into George’s office and said, “We’re out of milk. We have none for morning oatmeal.” George stood up, took Mary’s hand, and with two orphanage employees, began to pray that God would bring in provision for the needs of the morning. Many little mouths would be waiting for the protein and nourishment of that milk.

While they prayed, someone knocked on the door. When Mary answered, she was handed an envelope with more than enough money for the milk. Within minutes two more envelopes and a pledge for money arrived at the door. By now, this had become a typical experience for the Mullers, but their gratitude and joy always surged in these moments. To think of how God was most likely moving on hearts even before they prayed was wonderful.

George Muller cared for ten thousand orphans in his lifetime. Today, the George Muller Charitable Trust still meets the needs of the homeless and poor. They still adhere to George’s model of trusting in God only to bring provision for the needs. Tens of thousands of lives have been changed in these two hundred years. Thousands destined for early deaths or lives of slavery and poverty have been given opportunity to create productive lives, some in full-time service to God themselves.

The Challenge: How many times do we shrink back from dreams God places in our hearts because we can’t imagine how to resource them? Where could we go forward right now if we could trust God for resources as the Mullers did?

“Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man’s power ends.” George Muller

Justice- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Verse: Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. Isaiah 1:17

The Story: To be a person of justice means to take personal responsibility for upholding what is right and true, no matter what everyone else around you might be doing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is remembered for this quality. As a young pastor in Germany, during the 1930's, Dietrich watched Hitler's rise to power with anger. By now, Hitler's policies were well articulated, and Bonhoeffer found it amazing that many German pastors endorsed him as the new Chancellor. At only twenty-seven years old, Bonhoeffer gave a radio address denouncing Hitler and warning people of the dangers of his policies. His address was cut off halfway through.

As more and more churches fell in line with Hitler's policies and the persecution of the Jews, in discouragement, Bonhoeffer took a two-year preaching assignment at a German church in London. When God called him back to his home country, Dietrich continued to speak out against Naziism. In 1936, his license to teach was revoked and he was declared an enemy of the state.

For a few years, Bonhoeffer traveled through Germany secretly teaching groups of students who were opposed to the Nazi movement also. By 1939, in fear that he would be forced to declare an oath of allegiance to Hitler, Bonhoeffer ran from his country again, this time to the United States. Within two years he returned to his homeland, ashamed that he had run and not stood by the courage of his convictions.

Upon his return, Bonhoeffer became part of the German resistance movement. His belief that an unparalleled evil demanded a dramatic response. So, he began to travel throughout Germany, under the guise of visiting churches. His true mission was information gathering for a small portion of the German military that secretly plotted to remove Hitler from power. As part of his mission with the resistance, Bonhoeffer helped many Jews escape from Germany.

In 1943, the Gestapo uncovered the underground railroad, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested. After two years in military prisons, he was sent to the notorious Buchenwald concentration camp. A fellow prisoner, a British army officer wrote this about the pastor. "Bonhoeffer was different, just quite calm and normal, seemingly perfectly at his ease... his soul really shone in the dark desperation of our prison. He was one of the very few men I have ever met to whom God was real and ever close to him."

On April 8, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spent the morning in prayer and was then led up to the gallows where he was hanged with a wire, to prolong his suffering.

The Challenge: What are we willing to do to stand for justice and the rights of the persecuted? What are we willing to risk to obey God's command to defend the oppressed?

"The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children." Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Determination- Harriet Tubman

The Verse: "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong," - 2 Corinthians 12:10 NIV.

The Story: Harriet Tubman escaped slavery from a Maryland plantation in 1849. When she arrived in the North she said, "I looked at my hands to see if I was de same person now I was free. Dere was such a glory ober eberything... and I felt like I was in heaven." After the hardships of slavery, it would be understandable if Harriet never returned to the South again, but gaining her own freedom was not enough. She wanted to help others gain hers.

With torture and death hanging over her head, if she was ever recaptured, Tubman made 19 trips back to the South and led out over 300 slaves. Many times, there were close calls with slave hunters and angry plantation owners. Sometimes the escaped slaves themselves became a danger as some wanted to turn back once they experienced the rigors and dangers of escaping. Tubman couldn't allow them to return and risk exposing everyone else under torture. She doggedly coaxed every slave she rescued to keep going, no matter what.

Slave holders put a 40,000-dollar bounty on her head but that didn't stop her. Fellow abolitionists and friends said that Harriet gained all her strength and determination from her relationship with God. Concerning being recaptured she said, "I can't die but once," and that become her motto. She knew how glorious life as a free person could be and she was determined to help as many as she could to experience that.

One of the most fascinating things about Tubman's journeys was that she gained all her directions and intel from God. When to go, where to go, who to trust, who not to trust, was knowledge she gained simply from listening to God. Fellow abolitionist, Thomas Garrett said of her, "I have never met any person of any color who had more confidence in the voice of God."

When the Civil War began, Tubman became a nurse, laundress, and spy for the Union forces in South Carolina. She was determined to give everything for the cause of abolishing slavery. At the end of the war, even after numerous honors, Harriet Tubman lived in poverty. It wasn't until 30 years later that she finally received a small government pension for her service to her country.

The Challenge: To rescue people from the physical bondage of human trafficking and substance addiction is a dangerous, messy process. To lead sinners, out of their bondage to Satan, into the light of Christ's love, can be a hot mess too. What kind of determination will it take to overcome all the obstacles and even the resistance from the prisoners themselves?

"I always tole God, 'I'm gwine [going] to hole stiddy on you, an' you've got to see me through.'"

Harriet Tubman

Creativity- Harriet Beecher Stowe

The Verse: “As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams, Daniel 1:17 NIV.

The Story: The written word and spoken word can be a persuasive force for good, or for evil, depending on who is speaking or writing. In Harriet Beecher Stowe’s hand it became a catalyst for an awakening to the evils of slavery. President Lincoln said of her, when he met her, “So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war.”

“Uncle Tom’s Cabin” was not the cause of the Civil War, but it did jolt millions of people into revelation about the life of a slave. Harriet’s upbringing by abolitionist parents prepared her for her destiny, but she had to carve time out of her schedule to write.

Wife to a Bible college professor with health issues and mother to seven, Stowe still set time to write. To describe herself, she said she was, “a little bit of a woman, just as thin and dry as a pinch of snuff; never very much to look at in my best days and very much used-up by now, a mere drudge with few ideas beyond babies and housekeeping.” Nevertheless, during those busy child-rearing years, Stowe honed her writing skills.

She wrote a collection of short stories and a book about the pilgrims during those years and experienced literary success. Her wise husband understood that his wife possessed the talent to write significant books that could alter societies and, “change the mind of the West for the coming generation,” about slavery. He encouraged her to slip away to write frequently.

During her early years, Stowe lived in Cincinnati, just across the river from slaveholding Kentucky. She watched the drama between slave owners and slaves unfold firsthand and, as part of the underground railroad, helped a number of slaves escape. Many years later during a church service, as a successful author she suddenly saw the entire death scene from “Uncle Tom...” in her head. She wrote the story that preceded that scene from there.

Stowe originally wrote the story as 40 installments in a magazine, but it was then translated into 23 languages. When it came out in book form, it sold a million copies before the Civil War started. It remains today as a classic that reveals the ridiculous ironies, prejudices and misapplied scriptures that fostered the American slave system.

The Challenge: Creativity takes time and tenacity. First efforts are often not that great and many folks back away from creative endeavors because they decide they are not “talented enough.” How might God want to alter a society through the creativity of someone reading this devotional?

“I did not write it. God wrote it. I merely did his dictation.” Harriet Beecher Stowe

Forgiveness- Jacob DeShazer

The Verse: “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you,” Matthew 6:14 NIV.

The Story: On April 18, 1942 18 crewmen dubbed “Doolittle’s Brigade,” executed a courageous daytime bombing raid on Japan that changed the course of World War 2. Although the raid didn’t cause that much physical damage, the effect on American moral was phenomenal. Corporal Jacob DeShazer was on the last plane in the formation. Once they completed their mission, the plane no longer had enough fuel to land at an airfield controlled by allies. The crew was forced to bail out over Japanese territory where they were captured immediately.

For 40 months, Jacob and his surviving crew members were tortured, starved, beaten, and kept in solitary confinement. In desperation, Jacob begged his captors to allow him to have a Bible. When the Japanese finally brought him one, months later, they told him he could only have it for three weeks. Jacob read eagerly and was particularly drawn to passages that talked about forgiveness. He said, “I discovered that God had given me new spiritual eyes and that when I looked at the enemy officers and guards who had starved and beaten my companions and me so cruelly, I found my bitter hatred for them changed to loving pity. I realized that these people did not know anything about my Savior and that if Christ is not in a heart, it is natural to be cruel.”

After the war, Jacob attended Bible college and received a degree in biblical literature. Determined to share the gospel with his former enemies, he returned to Japan as a pastor and served there for 30 years, sharing the gospel with his story of forgiveness and love. During that time, he wrote a gospel tract entitled, “I Was A Prisoner of Japan,” which was distributed around the world.

In 1950, the tract fell into the hands of a most unlikely reader, Mitsuo Fuchida, the Japanese pilot who led the attack on Pearl Harbor. Reading the remarkable story of Jacob’s torture and imprisonment and his forgiveness for his captors, broke the hard shell of Mitsuo’s heart and he accepted Jesus Christ as his savior that day. Only heaven will tell the full story of all the souls brought into the kingdom because Jacob DeShazer chose to forgive and then spend the rest of his life acting on that attitude of love.

The Challenge: As we think of people who have wronged us, maybe horribly, it is entirely normal that we might not want to be around them at all. What if some of us are being called by God to return to those who have harmed us, as Jacob did, to let them know we’ve forgiven them and to share God’s love with them?

“...if we are given the commandment to love one another, it is surely possible for us actually to do so. Since God has given the commandment to love, our part of the transaction is to put forth an effort and try to have love for others.” Jacob DeShazer

Initiative and Innovation- Dwight L. Moody

The verse: “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert,” Isaiah 43:19 ESV.

Dwight L. Moody gave no indication in early years that he’d be remembered as one of the most influential and innovative evangelists of the 19th century.

As an ambitious, young shoe salesman, Moody’s life goal was to make 100,000 dollars. In today’s dollars that’s 2 million. After he was led to Christ by a friend, Moody’s eyes turned in other directions, to places of poverty and need. He especially noticed the children in Chicago’s slums, who seemed to have no connection with a church.

At the age of 21, in 1858, Moody established a children’s Sunday School in the heart of one of Chicago’s worst slums, in North Market Hall. He drew children in with candy and pony rides and the adults with prayer meetings and English-speaking classes, since most were immigrants. The Sunday School grew into a church. People were attracted to the new thing God was doing in a slum. By 1861, Moody left his shoe business to devote himself to social work entirely. He used to say to people, “If you can truly convince a man that you love him, you have won him.”

In 1871, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed Moody’s home and church. As he looked to God for new direction on how to rebuild, he had an encounter with the presence of God that was so strong he cried out, on a sidewalk in the middle of Chicago’s Wall Street, “Hold Lord, it is enough.” In those moments, God called Moody out of social work and into evangelism.

When he was 36, a door opened for him to begin preaching in the British Isles in 1873, to small crowds. As conversions multiplied, soon Moody addressed crowds of thousands. To meet the needs of locations and peoples, Moody became inventive with evangelism strategies. He created the door-to-door neighborhood canvas concept, the ecumenical approach of recruiting local churches to help with the crusade, the rental of large buildings for crusades, seeking financial support from local businesses, featuring a crusade soloist, and providing a room for counseling seekers. No other evangelist had ever used such methods before.

When the Chicago 1893 World Exhibition decided to stay open on Sundays many churches boycotted. Not Moody. “Let us open so many preaching places and present the gospel so attractively that people will want to come and hear it,” he declared. In one day there, 130,000 people attended his services.

The Challenge: We can become so comfortable with our church systems; we miss the new things God might be doing for several reasons. We are afraid of failure and looking foolish and we are not paying attention to God’s new thing. What might happen if we paid better attention and stopped worrying about failure?

“Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter.” Dwight L. Moody

Sacrifice- Lillias Trotter

The Verse: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,” Romans 12:1 NIV.

The Story: Raised in privilege and wealth in London’s West end during the 1800’s, Lillias Trotter was a gifted artist. In her early twenties, at a spiritual life conference, God called her to invest her life in those far outside her sheltered world, the prostitutes of London. She applied for full-time volunteer work with the young YWCA and pursued her art in her off hours.

On a family trip to Venice, her art captured the attention of the world’s foremost art critic of that time, John Ruskin. He offered to mentor her and assured he could help her become one of England’s greatest living artists. Lillias felt torn in two directions between God’s call and Ruskin’s offer. She chose God and at the age of 26, wrote to a friend, “I see as clear as daylight now, I cannot give myself to painting in the way [Ruskin] means and continue to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

For ten years Lillias continued her full-time volunteer work at the YWCA and continued to paint until one day when she heard a message about the unreached Muslim people of Algiers. She applied to a mission but was turned down for health reasons. Instead, using her own money, Lillias moved to Algiers to work alongside the mission even though she was not part of it. Lillias spent the next 40 years ministering in a French Colony to the Muslim Arabs of Algiers where she pioneered methods and materials to reach Muslims that people now consider to be decades ahead of their time. Some people believe she planted the seeds of the Christian church that exists there today.

Lillias sacrificed at least two lives I can see. One as a successful European artist and probably another as a wife and mother of some wealthy Englishman. She chose to enter a world where she wasn’t privileged or even celebrated and definitely not pampered. She laid aside the best the world could offer her for God’s best and his call on her life.

The Challenge: People tend to go where they are celebrated not tolerated. That’s human nature. I wonder though, if at times, we miss God’s plans for us because we desire to feel appreciated more than we long to be dedicated to whatever God has for us. I think we might do better to consider the privileged life Jesus left behind for our sakes, how about you?

“Dare to have it out with God and ask him to show you whether or not all is focused on Christ and his glory.” Lillias Trotter

To purchase Bible studies and art by Lillias visit lilliastr Trotter.com