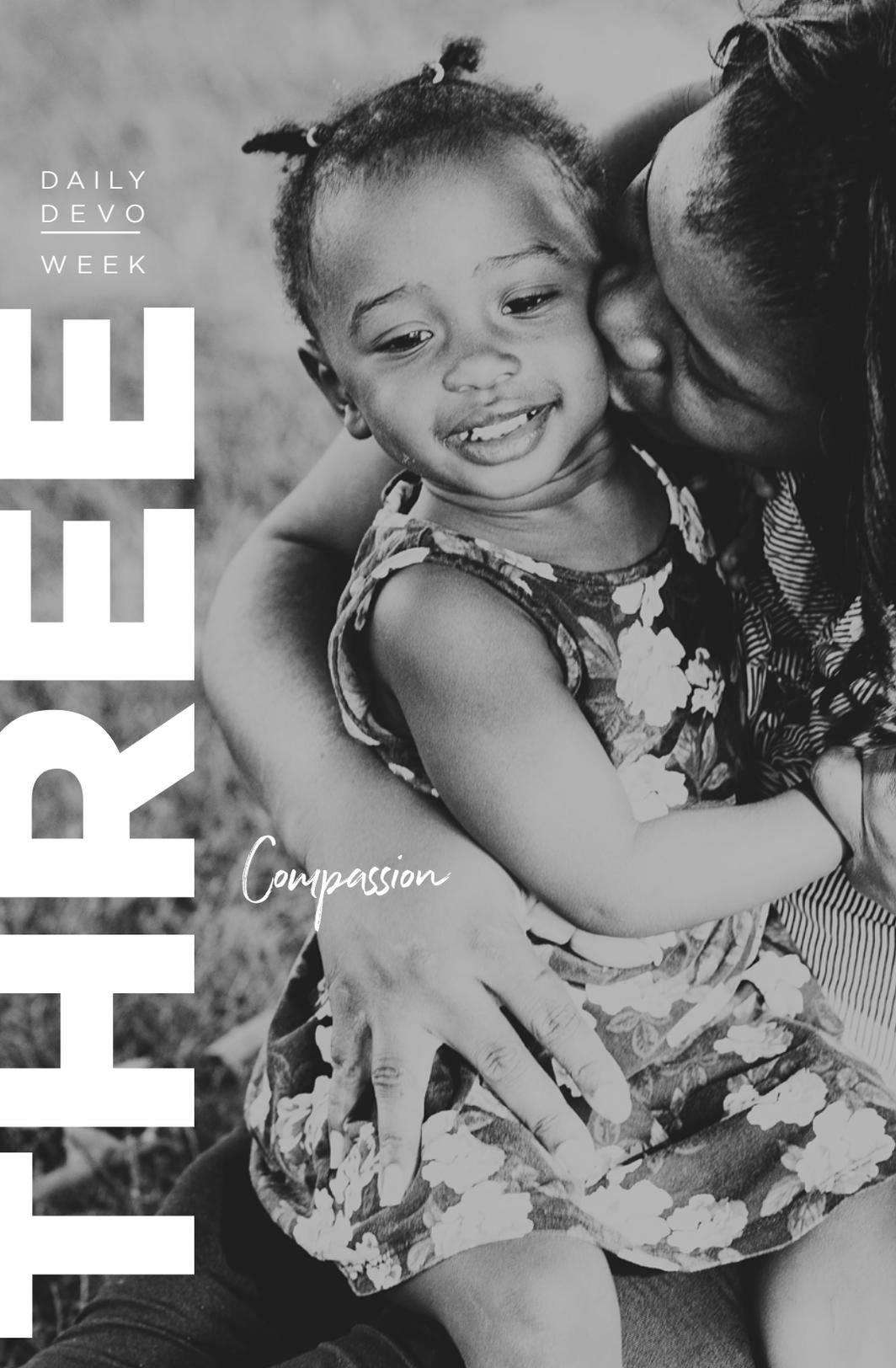


DAILY
DEVO
WEEK

FREE

Compassion



DAY 16

Co-Suffering

“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

—Romans 8:16-17

HEART //

How incredible it is that God would call us His children! Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, God has brought us into His family and has given us true life in Him. As a family, we have the privilege of being co-heirs with Christ. One day, when we see Him face to face, we will finally see and savor Him fully as we share in His eternal inheritance (1 Corinthians 13:12).

But we don’t have to wait until we reach the Kingdom to share in and shout out His glory. Today’s verse reminds us that suffering for His namesake is a necessary part of the Christian life, as much as the ‘good stuff’ is. If Jesus is the exact replica of the glory of God (Hebrews 1:3), and the crescendo of His life was a victorious death on the cross, then we can share in God’s glory today by dying to ourselves, serving others, and anticipating resurrection in areas of our lives!

In other words, for Jesus, compassion IS the good stuff.

Let’s break the word *compassion* down a little bit. Its original definition comes from the idea of shared suffering: the compassionate person is someone who ‘suffers with’ another person. Truly, no one is more compassionate than Christ—who suffered *for* us! Though we cannot bear the sins of others (which only Jesus can do, and only He has done), we can bear the *burdens* of others.

How does the Bible call us to ‘suffer with’ and bear the burdens of one another? Think about the second great commandment that Jesus gives us in Matthew 22. He calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. This means that we should be willing to feel what they feel, and we should be willing to put ourselves in their place, and alleviate any suffering they may be experiencing! As followers of Jesus, our hearts should be consistently touched and moved by the suffering of fellow humans.

We are God’s children, and He has given us everything we need to be His hands and feet to those He has called us to serve. We become more like God when we engage our hearts with His and begin to care about the people that He cares about. Putting others first doesn’t *a/ways* mean giving up life as you know it, or giving thousands upon thousands of dollars to orphans, widows or unborn babies. It can mean leaning into the lives of young people in your church or volunteering time at a local pregnancy resource center!

However, when we open our hearts, caring about the vulnerable people in our world, we will be driven to live differently. ‘Living differently’—compared to the self-focus so prevalent in our world—is a very good and godly thing.



//WORK

When our hearts become engaged passionately with an issue as serious as abortion, often it can cause feelings of anger and hopelessness.

That's why we need to ask God to help us to respond to men and women facing an unplanned pregnancy as Jesus does—with compassion. Speaking with compassion doesn't mean that we become afraid to tell the truth about abortion. It means our words are filled with supernatural kindness, and it means that love and action always follow close behind our conversations.

Speaking with compassion doesn't mean that we become afraid to tell the truth about abortion. It means our words are filled with supernatural kindness, and it means that love and action always follow close behind our conversations.

Real compassion means co-suffering with others. It means paying attention to the needs of abortion-vulnerable women in our communities—even when it might feel overwhelming.

This week we want you to take on the empathy challenge of fasting all negative speech...No gossip. No complaints. No criticism. No judgment or bitterness. **Let's practice letting go of these words,** just for a week. Let's practice being further defined by love and inviting the compassion of Jesus to fill that empty space in ways we may have never imagined.

As you process what this week's challenge may look like for you, think back to how Jesus spoke to the woman at the well in John 4. He didn't hide from the truth. He told her the truth about her sins. But even as Jesus did so, He gave her a new way to live: a life based on Himself, the Living Water. **Pray that God would make you truthful, gentle, and kind in your speech this week. Ask that He would make you willing to co-suffer and act with compassion.**



DAY 17

Touching the Need

“A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.” —Mark 1:40-42

HEART // All throughout Scripture, Jesus was drawn to human beings in need. Not only did he see the needs of those around Him, but He was also willing to act on their behalf. We take our cue from Christ: compassionate people do not only see the need...compassionate people *touch* the need.

During the time that Jesus walked the earth, it would have been considered ‘defilement,’ like pollution or contamination, to touch a person with leprosy. Christ embraced the risk that touching the man posed to His reputation, though. He cared more for the man than He did about cultural norms or what people would say about Him. He lovingly engaged in the suffering that the man faced at great risk to Himself, healing the man as a result.

We, too, must embrace taking risks if we want to follow Jesus. It comes naturally for us to close our eyes to the needs of the people around us. We can be overly concerned with ourselves—with what people think of us, with how they perceive us, or with our hope to serve others “not working”

What does the world see when it looks at your life?

or being too costly. Jesus asks us to love one another as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39), and He says that the

world will know that we are His disciples by the way that we love one another (John 13:35). Ask yourself: *What does the world see when it looks at your life?* It should be struck by your willingness to love others well, regardless of the risk!

We have the opportunity to reach out and touch one of the most difficult, socially-complicated needs of our time with hope and healing. When we encourage an abortion-minded woman to make a life-affirming choice, we must realize that we are asking her to take a 'risk.' Abortion can be tempting. It just seems less risky: less money, less effort, and less hardship. We, as the church, have the opportunity to make parenthood slightly 'less risky' for these women. Of course, pregnancy and parenting are costly and that cost should never be underplayed, but it can definitely be (and is meant to be!) supported. In love, we can help mothers to see the actual risk of abortion—that they may go in hoping they're doing the right thing, but the enemy of their soul will likely change the tune to one of accusation, guilt and shame on their way out. What a trap.

Touching the need starts with simply building trust—being willing to love without judgment, to step into uncomfortable spaces and to risk our own resources (time, emotions, money, and more) right along with those we're serving. Not one of us can solve this issue, but together we can do our best to reach out of our comfort zones to ensure that these women really do have the opportunity before them to make a life-affirming choice: the funds, the resources, and the community necessary to help them value and uphold the life within them. It's a life that God so values and so wants to uphold.

As Christ equips the church, His body, to be His own hands, this question is monumentally important: *Are we willing?*

Watch, at the *Reimagining Pro-Life* page, the video of Ashley Bratcher, who plays Abby Johnson in the movie *Unplanned*, share about her "yes to God".

Find all *Reimagining Pro-Life: 30 Days with Save the Storks* videos and blogs at www.savethestorks.com/reimagine



//WORK

Let's keep our eyes open for opportunities to say our own "yes to God"!

A Barna study shows that 70% of women choosing abortion identify as Christians.*

We may feel like the abortion issue is "out there, in the world", but the reality is that there are abortion-vulnerable women in our churches, our families, our family of God who are feeling a real sense of panic, anxiety, loneliness, and fear at the thought of keeping their babies.

How can you use your words (both in person and on social media) to extend Christlike compassion to them? As you empty your words of unproductive anger, judgment, hopelessness, and complaining this week (and hopefully always!), try to fill your words up with Christlike compassion and love instead.

Christ didn't say, "Because I have to." He said, "I am willing." Remember: Christ didn't say, "Because I have to," when he reached out His hand to heal the man. He said, "I am willing." The world will know that we love Him when we are willing to be healing conduits for others—just as Jesus was—regardless of the consequences.

Pray about and act on just one 'risk' you can take today to touch a need in the world around you.** It can be small or large, but make it something that shows you value someone else's needs over your own comfort.

Write about your experience in your journal, along with answering these questions: *Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like someone cared about you more than he or she cared about reputation? How did that feel?*

**Healthy risks include risking your own popularity, comfort or certainty for the sake of another. If you are young, please run your 'risky' business by a trusted adult before doing anything that could be damaging to your life, well-being, or to others.

DAY 18

Great Love

“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” —Lamentations 3:21-23

HEART // God is in the business of hope and love, compassion and faithfulness. Even in a world filled with much vulnerability and despair, God’s nature gives us reason to hope. And as we hope, His open-handedness toward us prompts us to live more generously! The kindness that we experience *vertically*—from God to us—should always become a *horizontal* act of sacrificial love—from us to others.

In our effort to love others well, we can be tempted to either take on too much or too little. When we tend toward taking on too much in our own strength, it’s not sustainable. We all know this feeling—relying on our own power, not plugged into the Source, we begin to fade and eventually break down. But when we tend toward taking on too little (or even nothing at all), we miss the incredible opportunity to engage in His work in the world. Sometimes finding the right balance is tricky! There is a better way! We can *be like God*.

Matthew 5:48 says, “Be perfect, therefore, *as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (emphasis added). Perfection, in this sense, means to be simply reflecting the reality and nature of our Father, who is perfect. Though we will undoubtedly stumble, God still calls us to be like (“as”) Him—because it is He that will compassionately sustain us day in and day out! We can live compassionately *because of His everlasting compassion toward us*.

We position ourselves rightly when we work for the Kingdom not on our own strength, but on *His*. We receive His grace every morning, an abundance that makes us both willing and able to live with the good of others, and not just ourselves, in mind. God wants to direct our steps, filling us with the hope, love, compassion, and faithfulness necessary to live abundantly for others.

The reality of generous compassion isn't just that those who "have it all together", or have an abundance of material possessions—those who the world may label "perfect"—are those who should be helping others.

Even the most materially poor or brand-new Christians are invited to give and love generously, and Scripture assures us that with selfless generosity comes indescribable joy.

It's that Christians need to be like their heavenly Father. We are invited, by Him, to do what He does. When we simply respond to His compassion toward us, we overflow with relentless compassion. Even the most

materially poor or brand-new Christians are invited to give and love generously, and Scripture assures us that with selfless generosity comes indescribable joy. (See John 12:1-11 for a bit of encouraging proof!)

If you're reading this devotional, you may be a woman who is suffering the trauma of an abortion; you may be someone who has worked tirelessly against abortion and feel out of steam and discouraged; you may be a pastor who knows that this is a serious issue, but has no idea how to engage it. Wherever you are, whatever you have to offer, whatever shame you may currently be carrying—know that it is no accident that you are here. God wants to remind you that "because of His great love, we are not consumed," and He has something for you to learn about *and* to give in the fight against this enormous issue facing our generation.

WORK

Write down your thoughts on this question: *What is one area of your life that you feel you would be "consumed" if it weren't for the Lord's great love?* Be encouraged that God's compassion for you never, ever fails. What does your morning routine look like? **Today's challenge is simply to consider rearranging your morning tomorrow.** No, not your entire day—just your morning. **Plan to wake and pray, worship, journal or meditate on a verse and tap into the compassion of your perfect Father before doing ANYTHING in your own strength.**

DAY 19

Loving the Stranger

“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.”

—Hebrews 13:1-3

HEART //

It’s a good and godly thing to love and care for friends and family members, but God doesn’t want us to stop there. He asks us to love and care for strangers, too! We should be as loving, as caring, and as provisional toward those that are different from us as we are toward those that are like us. We are called to serve people that look, live, speak, and think differently than we do.

After all, Christ loved us unto death even while we were alienated from Him! Romans 5:8 tells us that “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” There couldn’t be a bigger difference between two people—between the sinner and Jesus—at the moment when He died on the cross! He is infinitely holy. We are infinitely frail. Jesus loved the stranger to an incomprehensible degree: “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

If we, as God’s people, really want to establish justice for the unborn, then we cannot be satisfied with only helping people that we know.

If we, as God’s people, really want to establish justice for the unborn, then we cannot be satisfied with only helping people that we know. We must be ethnically and socioeconomically diverse with our love, care, and provision. Remember, all people are made in the image of God!

The unsettling facts are: The abortion rate of women on medicaid is 3 times higher than other women. The abortion rate among women of color is 3.5 times that of caucasian women.*

Whatever our neighborhood, social status or skin color, we must all be willing to reach outside of our comfort zones to encounter and support one another—even those who seem like strangers to us. Even though we don't always know first names, God has counted the number of hairs on the head of every passerby (Luke 1:27). He values and attends to all human life. *Will we?*

There is always the temptation to go into a 'camp' mentality, choosing one camp or another and pitting ourselves against those who haven't joined our side. But Jesus is the Lord of all, and He loves and knows those in the other camp! Think of the imagery that God gives us of a body: the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). There are major differences between an eye and a toe! So many differences in function—and distance, even—that they may feel like strangers to one another, but they are nonetheless a part of the same body.

What better strategy of the enemy than to get parts of the body to work against one another, fighting each other—rather than moving forward in their own gifts and unity? God commands us to love the stranger. Sometimes that's someone who doesn't know Him, and sometimes it's people who are a part of our own body who we just haven't noticed before. Either way, it will take us all, moving forward together, to make an impact on our world.

There's no way for us to know the wonderful plans that God has for women who, in your city today, are considering an abortion. Many are mistreated or feel completely unsupported. What are God's plans for their precious unborn babies? It should be enough for us to know that our Lord made them all wonderfully, that we link arms in order to help them become the people God wants them to be (Psalms 139:14). Let us be people who love like Jesus does, refusing to ignore the stranger.

//WORK

One way that you can support people facing unplanned pregnancies is by supporting a local pregnancy resource center. The staff members may be strangers to you, but you can still partner with them. By encouraging them with your words, you can bring them a breath of fresh air. The truth of the Scriptures; gift cards; a sticky-note reminder that their work matters to you and to your community—any of these could be exactly what they need on a tough day. Many workers at pregnancy resource centers are bombarded by discouragement in the face of such a huge and complicated problem.

So, in addition to fasting negative speech this week, **send an encouraging note to a pregnancy resource center near you.** As you empty yourself of many unhealthy words, you should also be filling up with Christlike goodness. So, you have encouragement to pour out! Use the power of your words for good. If we really want to effect change in the abortion crisis nationwide, we have to build a tribe that supports each other in a unified, reimagined pro-life voice expressing love, compassion, and action toward those who may be in the crux of making that decision or having already made it.

For encouragement, **check out the blog** of Police Officer Jesse Whitten and wife Ashley, former Save the Storks team members, who share their personal testimony of connecting with a homeless woman and later adopting her baby!

Find all *Reimagining Pro-Life: 30 Days with Save the Storks* videos and blogs at www.savethestorks.com/reimagine



DAY 20

Knowing God by Living Like Him

“*[Josiah] defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me? declares the LORD.*” —Jeremiah 22:16

HEART // At this point in the book of Jeremiah, God steps in and speaks to the kings (Jehoiakim and Josiah) that are leading the nation of Judah. He rebukes Jehoiakim for the unrighteous, unjust means that he is using to build his palace. Josiah, on the other hand, has begun to fight for the weak, the needy, and the vulnerable people in Judah, revealing his desire to establish righteousness and justice throughout the land. And so God declares that it is Josiah who knows Him, for all human righteousness and justice stem from the nature of our Creator, God.

God defends the weak, the needy, and the vulnerable. It is *what He does* because it is *who He is*. We, too, must defend these people. It is *what we do* because He is the One *who we worship*. If we know and love God, we can't help but help those in need.

Could there be a weaker, more needy, or more vulnerable human being than an unborn child? Could there be a soul more anxious, a heart more conflicted, than that of a mom who feels like she has no choice but to end the life of her own baby?

Could there be a weaker, more needy, or more vulnerable human being than an unborn child? Could there be a soul more anxious, a heart more conflicted, than that of a mom who feels like she has no choice but to end the life of her own baby?

God grieves the fact that women and children everywhere are hurting in many ways. He doesn't stop at heartbrokenness, though. In the story of Josiah, we see that God's grief always drives Him to action!

Describing the way that the early church honored the image of God, intrinsic to all human beings, author and pastor Tim Keller says,

“They were not [a] one-issue people.” They tried to alleviate the suffering of every group of people. “At that time, most people said that if you are a widow, you’ve got to remarry. [Believers] were champions of women; they were champions of orphans; they were champions of the weak; they were champions of the poor. And they were against abortion. And they put the rest of the culture to shame because of their belief in the sanctity of life.”*

Surely, the issues of injustice in our world are deep and complex, and it may take generations of change to make a dent in the problems at large. Still, Christians must take action. Because we believe in an all-powerful, compassionate God, we must serve the weak, the needy, and the vulnerable. We defend unborn children and their mothers because that’s what God does.

//WORK

There are many ways that we can take up the cause of others. We can be educated on the issues in local communities, around the nation, and throughout the world. We can joyfully adjust our consumerist ways, prioritizing the needs of others over our own luxuries.

Let’s take up the cause of abortion-vulnerable women today in a practical way. **Share an online resource that champions mothers.** It could be one of our blog posts, like the one on real freedom of choice (found at the *Reimagining Pro-Life* page), or an article that another pro-life ministry has published.

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You could share it publicly via your favorite social media, or you could simply text a link to a close family member or friend. You don’t even have to send it digitally! You could read an article aloud to your kids or a neighbor.

Here’s the point: as you forego negative speech this week, make sure that *love*, that *encouragement*, is flowing from your lips. The opposite of negative speech is not silence—though the Bible does commend the ability to be slow to speak! (See passages like James 1:19.) As we saw in today’s verse, *speaking like Christ, in defense of the defenseless* is part of knowing God more! What a joy and honor!

DAY 21

How to Love Christ

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ‘The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” —Matthew 25:37-40

HEART //

There are a lot of astonishing things going on in this passage. First, Matthew tells us that Jesus will come back. Of that, we can be sure. We can also know that His arrival will be glorious because He is already victorious! Though sin assails us, though perfectly righteous lives evade us, “thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:56).

In the fight for life, we *can* and *should* have a winning mentality, like we discussed in Day 8. Jesus reigns now and always! When we extend compassion to men and women facing an unplanned pregnancy, we can stand resolutely hopeful—regardless of the outcome of our efforts. One victory sustains our every pro-life endeavor: Christ defeated sin and death on the cross, and then He rose to His appointed seat in Heaven beside the Father (Romans 8:2–4; Ephesians 2:6). There is a battle between life and death, and in the end, life wins!

What part is there left for us to play? Loving the vulnerable people that He made in His image is our honor and joy. (Remember Psalm 139?) Pastor Mike Dsane says that “if we’re not careful,” we would read this text and respond by saying, “Okay, if I feed enough hungry people and give away enough clothes and let enough people sleep on my couch, then I’m going to earn the kingdom.”* That’s not what Jesus says! Human effort does not purchase a *ticket* to heaven. No, the

blood of Christ purchased *us*, as Christ alone—not our own righteous ‘doing’—can grant us eternal life.

On the other hand, we may think that our compassion won’t make a difference, but that’s simply untrue. No matter your age, income, amount of free time, number of resources—God wants to use all of it for His Kingdom. We simply our lives at His feet in prayer, asking Him to provide us with the wisdom to know how and where to use our time, money, and resources compassionately for the hungry and thirsty, for strangers and needy people, for the sick and the prisoner. Jesus does not hesitate to identify Himself with the lowly, and we should be quick to see and help others as does the King of the universe. Whether their words and actions declare that He is King or not, their *makeup* does! We can love Christ by loving the people that He made in His likeness.

Jesus does not hesitate to identify Himself with the lowly.

//WORK

Today, make a plan to gather with friends or family to pray together.

An essential aspect of fasting from negative speech is filling our minds and our mouths with the word of God, which always leads us to prayer!

Before your prayer meeting, consider doing some research on the pro-life ministries in your area. God is at work in the lives of the vulnerable and needy. *What are a few things that you and your community can do throughout the rest of Reimagining Pro-Life: 30 Days with Save the Storks to help the pro-life ministries in your area?* Maybe you can give up something that you would normally buy so that you can begin to spend yourself for women facing an unplanned pregnancy and their many needs. Maybe you can volunteer, supply donations, or simply ask them what needs they have!



DAY 22

God's Rescue Strategy

“Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

—Psalms 82:3-4

HEART // The world esteems the wealthy, the influential and the privileged. In God's economy, it is exactly the opposite. Over and over again in Scripture, God commands His followers to honor and defend the most vulnerable people in society. The Lord doesn't love and fight for us because we are powerful or good. (In fact, we are all poor when it comes to our own righteousness!) The Lord loves us because it's who He is. Similarly, we actively love others because it's who we are in Christ.

Over and over again in Scripture, God commands His followers to honor and defend the most vulnerable people in society.

The people who cannot speak up or fight for themselves are special in His sight. Jesus urged us to

treat our hungry and needy neighbors with dignity. Why? Well, just think back to yesterday's verse. What we do to “the least” of the people in the world, we do unto Him (Matthew 25:46).

As Christians, we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). We should be so astounded by what was purchased on the cross that we want to bring this Good News to all people. When the world looks at us, they should not remember us in terms of the sports that we play; the universities that we attend; the quality of our pictures on social media; or the sizes of our houses. The world should be struck by the way that we spend ourselves on behalf of the weak, just as Christ spent Himself on behalf of us—we who are weak apart from Jesus.

Psalms 140:12 tells us that God alone secures justice for the poor and upholds their cause, and today's passage calls *us into that work*.

Often, God secures justice through us. We are to defend defend the unborn by proclaiming the truth about the value of life, beginning with conception, and to speak that message with love, compassion and action, while praying that those who have ears will hear. A message delivered in this manner is able to speak to the abortion-minded as well as those who have had abortions, or support or perform abortion and, by the beautiful grace of God, hearts and minds can be changed.

Jesus calls us out of passivity. In our sinful selfishness, we often want to separate ourselves from the brokenness around us. God calls us to be different. He wants us to see people, and then He wants us to meet them with compassionate action. God so loved the world that He GAVE (John 3:16). When we call ourselves by His name, we must urgently do the same.

//WORK

How profound has it been for you to fast negative speech? We hope that it is starting to hit you how differently the world would view the pro-life movement if compassion and love—rather than anger, judgment, and gossip—flowed from our mouths. It's heartbreaking to think that many abortion-vulnerable women do not feel as if their lives are valued by the those in the church. Our words and actions can change that.

Today, as Compassion Week comes to a close, write down your thoughts about your experience fasting negative speech. Do you feel like you have made any necessary moves from judgment (of others or of yourself) to compassion when it comes to abortion? How about other areas of your life or ministry?

Please, watch the video of Victoria Robinson, with Save the Storks, who works diligently to bring hope to expectant (and unexpected) mothers. Her testimony reminds us that there are women and men suffering from the repercussions of abortion all around us—in our churches and communities—and how powerful reaching out with love can be.

Find all *Reimagining Pro-Life: 30 Days with Save the Storks* videos and blogs at www.savethestorks.com/reimagine

APPENDIX

Day 1

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