Act Justly, *Love Mercy*, Walk Humbly.

A four-week group devotional from Mercy Ships

About this Devotional

This devotional can be used by home groups and church fellowships for Bible study and prayerful reflection. We pray that as you work through this series with your group, you and your church will be inspired to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

Each session is divided into 6 activities:

- **WATCH** a short video
- **STORY** an inspiring real-life story
- **READ** passages of scripture
- **REFLECT** some thoughts on the verses
- **RESPOND** questions to consider and discuss
- **PRAY AND TAKE AWAY** a thought to pray about and take away into your week

Group leaders should feel free to tailor these to your group and to pray after each session.

Why did Mercy Ships create this devotional?

All of us know someone whose life has been changed or saved by an operation or medical treatment.

Sadly, 2 out of 3 people in our world still don't have access to safe, affordable surgery when they need it.

The problem is most acute in sub-Saharan Africa, where over 90% of people are not able to get medical care or surgery. This means that abject poverty is turning treatable medical conditions into life-threatening diseases, such as facial tumours, childbirth injuries, leg disabilities, curable blindness and burn scars that fuse limbs.

Each year, 18 million people die from a lack of access to safe, affordable surgery when they need it. It is taking more lives than HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria combined. This Global Surgery Crisis is a great injustice in our world.

This is where Mercy Ships comes in... we believe that access to healthcare should not depend on where you are born.

In Micah 6:8, we read: *"What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*

Mercy Ships helps the Church 'act justly' and 'love mercy', by providing free surgery for the poor. Founded in 1978 by Don and Deyon Stephens, we follow the model of Jesus, bringing hope and healing.

Mercy Ships operate the world's largest charity hospital ships providing over 2000 free, life-changing surgeries every year. The majority of our crew are local church volunteers, who serve in over 400 roles. Mercy Ships also trains local surgeons and medical professionals in every country we visit to ensure that once we leave the country's healthcare provision is stronger than when we arrived.

Whoever you are, find out how you can join in with this exciting mission at

www.mercyships.org.uk/church

Where you see these blue ovals, just click to visit the webpage!

The Mercy Ships Model

Mercy Ships work to eradicate the diseases of poverty and to effectively do ourselves out of a job - by improving healthcare delivery in every country we visit.

Mercy Ships have a three tier approach:

- ***Reduce the surgical backlog by providing free surgeries***
- ***Training for surgeons and professionals in the African nations we visit.***
- ***Renovating hospitals and providing medical supplies***

... everything is offered **free**.

Mercy Ships delivers a five-year partnership model with every country:

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Week 1

WATCH

The Global Surgery Injustice

STORY

Josh, Food Services Manager on *Africa Mercy*:
"Here on the ship I can use the gifts, talents and abilities that God has supplied me with to further the work of this community. I'll never be able to do surgery on a patient with a large tumour or rebuild a dental clinic, but I can plan, supply, cook, serve and clean up after a meal that gives others the ability to do that. I know an army marches on its stomach, and the level of food served can make a big difference on the morale of the crew."

READ

John 6: 5- 11

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, 'It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!' 8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?' 10 Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

REFLECT

In today's first passage we read of the well-known miracle: the feeding of the five thousand.
The crowds are gathered to be spiritually fed by Jesus' teaching, and Jesus also had compassion for their physical needs. The disciple Phillip wants to dismiss the crowd as he sees no way to feed all the people. Peter sees potential in what a small boy has brought with him, but the food on offer is nowhere near enough to feed the huge crowd.

This is often how we feel when we see the great needs set before us - how can such a small amount of our time, our money, or our skills, make an ounce of difference? Yet, Jesus takes the small amount that the boy has, he blesses it and then miraculously it feeds everyone in the crowd. There's even left-overs! This passage teaches us to offer what little we have to Jesus and somehow He then takes it, blesses it and uses it to bless others. We need to give what we have to God and place it in the hands of Jesus!

RESPOND

1) Why do you think God wanted us to have this story in the gospels?
2) When have you been confronted with need beyond your capacity?
4) What do you feel your gifts and abilities might be? If you're unsure, perhaps others in your group can help you to work this out, either in pairs or altogether.

PRAY AND TAKEAWAY

Consider the small boy with his packed lunch, how could you use what God has given you to respond to the needs you see in your community, our nation and the wider world? Spend some time praying about this together.

Week 2

WATCH

Fifalina's Story

STORY

Sophie and Auriette

Sophie and Auriette have children who received free orthopaedic (leg) surgeries onboard the Mercy Ships hospital ship in Madagascar. A crew member who was a writer asked them, "What is your favourite memory of being on the ship?" To her surprise, they both had the same answer- they deeply appreciated that everything Mercy Ships did was laced with love. The way the crew tried to make them smile. The way the crew gave colouring books to children during recovery time. The way the volunteer crew played and laughed with them. Auriette worded it this way: 'You cure with love.'

READ

1 John 3:1-2

[1] See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. [2] Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

[4] Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. [5] It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. [6] Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. [7] It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

REFLECT

It all starts with God loving us. A dose of God's love accompanies every act of kindness we show to one another. The apostle John describes this love as 'great', and says it has been 'lavished on us' – perhaps you need to hear this afresh today? God loves you. God calls you His beloved 'child'.

And what is God's love for us like? It is patient and kind. His love for us is not rooted in self-seeking motives like human love, but it protects us and hopes for our best. God is not quick-tempered, but slow to anger.

RESPOND

1) When have you seen love in action that has really inspired you?
2) Which trait in the description of love (e.g. patient, kind, not self-seeking) stands out to you most, and why?
3) What does it mean to you to be God's 'beloved child'?

PRAY AND TAKEAWAY

What if you replaced "Love is", with your own name each time this phrase phrase appears in 1 Corinthians 13. E.g. John ...is patient, or Jane ...is kind? Which aspect of love could you ask God to help you develop in this week?

The source of all love is God and His love can fuel your own love for others. Spend some time praying about this.

Week 3

WATCH

Dr Agbessi

STORY

Faharoa and Elina

Five-year-old Faharoa had a benign tumour that made her lips large and purple. Six-year-old Elina had severe burns that welded her right arm to her body. These girls received surgery and physical therapy onboard a Mercy Ships hospital ship over several months. They also received love and acceptance from the nurses. Fingernails were painted, songs were sung and stories were read. And something wonderful happened! The girls' true personalities began to emerge. They giggled, they played, and they were healed. It was amazing to watch the newfound hope in their eyes.

READ

John 15:1-8

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Luke 5:1-11

1 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. 2 He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

7 So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."

11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

REFLECT

True fruitfulness comes from relying on God and seeking to do his will. John 15 reveals that we cannot bear fruit apart from God – we must 'remain in him' if we are to see the fruit from our actions.

Relying on God's wisdom and strength may seem natural in our areas of weakness, but how do we look to God for help in the areas where we are strong and gifted? In Luke 5, Simon (Peter) is an experienced expert fisherman who has been fishing all night without success. When Jesus speaks into his fishing (his area of great experience and expertise) "they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break" (v6).

We are not saved by our works (or skills) but by God's grace, and as we rely on him and remain in Christ we can see far more fruit than if we act and serve in our own strength and understanding.

RESPOND

1) What do you think it means to 'remain in Jesus'? What does this really look like in practice?
2) Do you find it easier to depend on God in your areas of weakness or in your strengths?
3) How can we better do God's will and work without becoming too self-reliant?

PRAY AND TAKEAWAY

In the West, we have access to medicines and world-class healthcare whenever we need it.

In the UK, we always have the NHS to rely on. But, tragically, two thirds of the world's population (5 billion people) do not have the same access to affordable healthcare and safe surgery that we do.

Thank God for the blessings of healthcare and medicines, and pray for Dr Agbessi, and others, who are seeking to provide medical care for those in desperate need and to train others in their nations.

"I believe when you are given a gift, you are meant to share it"

Dr Odry Agbessi became Benin's first reconstructive surgeon, trained by Mercy Ships.

She now operates on burns patients and trains other local surgeons across West Africa.

Week 4

WATCH

Act Justly, Love Mercy Video with JB Gill (JLS and BBC)

STORY

Five Siblings

Five children, ages 6 to 15, sat silently on a long wooden bench. All five were from the same family. Despite the bright sunny day, they sat in darkness, blind from birth by cataracts. In the West, these children would have had a restorative surgery before they spoke their first word. Mercy Ships was their only chance for a future in the light.

Onboard the Africa Mercy, Mercy Ships volunteer doctors performed successful surgeries for all five children – completely free of charge. The horrible darkness was gone! It was replaced by the music of children's laughter. Their mother said, "I am so happy, so thankful."

READ

1 Corinthians 12:18-27 *18 …God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

Ephesians 2:4-10 *4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

REFLECT

We are all different, in fact you are unique. In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells us that we are all part of Christ's body, and no single part of the body is more important than another. The eyes are just as important as the feet. We certainly notice when one of our own feet or eyes causes us pain or becomes a problem. Even something as small as a tooth can affect the whole body - a bad toothache can ruin your whole day. Likewise, God has given all of us gifts and talents to use in His service. No matter how you feel about yourself today, the truth is that you are part of God's body, and so you have a part to play in His divine plan to bring hope, healing and love to this world. You are a masterpiece in the making – 'God's handiwork'.

Over the last few weeks, we have thought about the ways that we can give God what He requires – doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly before Him. These passages reveal that God has important plans for each of us, every one of us plays a vital part in the Church – the Body of Christ – in fact, we were each 'created in Christ Jesus to do good works', which 'God has prepared'. Do you know what these plans may be? Have you asked God?

RESPOND

1) As individuals, what could you be doing to serve others more or just differently in your own church?
2) As a group, how can you use your skills and strengths to reach out to those in need in your community?
3) What will your group do for the poorest people in the world through the ministry of Mercy Ships?

Suggestions:

GIVE and PRAY

- Share a Mercy Ships video or use some Mercy Ships church slides one Sunday
- Ask everyone to attend church one Sunday wearing their 'Monday clothes' – celebrate the different skills in your church, with all the proceeds providing free surgeries for the poor.
- Nominate Mercy Ships to be a Mission Partner / Charity of the Year for your church

Or download Make History Pack for more ideas.

Could you GO?

- Explore some of the roles onboard our hospital ships – only half the volunteer roles are medical! Each person plays their part in the 'Body', whether they're wearing a boiler-suit below decks or dressed in scrubs serving in the operating theatre. Does your church have a teacher, a mechanic, a hair stylist, an IT specialist, an accountant, a housekeeper, or an engineer - to name a few of the 200 options?

PRAY AND TAKEAWAY

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." – so says 1 Peter 4, verses 10-11.

Spend some time as a group praying for the work of Mercy Ships, particularly the patients and volunteer crew, whose stories you have heard and watched in recent weeks. Pray about the gifts God has given each of you and how you might use these to respond to God's challenge to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God in the coming weeks and months.

Further stories and devotionals

Many of the stories in this devotional are taken from the book DAILY DOSE OF MERCY by Don Stephens - 365 short daily devotions on the theme of mercy. Each day's reading takes about one minute to read, and is accompanied by a short scripture passage and a gentle tug on your heart to be the light of mercy in someone's life each day.

For more inspiring stories and videos of our amazing patients and volunteer crew,

visit our website or check out our YouTube channel

About the author

This free resource was produced by Mercy Ships with Bex White, a pastor in the Assemblies of God in inner-city London. Bex is married to a doctor, and together they combine work in their local community with medical missions overseas. Bex is still learning how to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

"Mercy Ships are unique. In countries that could not imagine the benefits of the NHS, Mercy Ships offer totally life-changing treatment and new hope. It's something the entire church can get behind by praying, giving or even going. What a wonderful opportunity to be a part of God changing lives through His people."

Cathy Madavan
Speaker and Author of Digging for Diamonds

"Every now and then God drops into the heart of one of His followers a vision and a dream that is so close to His heart for the poor and the broken that it can't help but become a reality. Mercy Ships is one such ministry."

Roy Crowne
Executive Director, Hope Together

"To care for the poor, to visit the sick, these are the basics. Mercy Ships gives us an exciting opportunity to partner with them and do just that."

Lou Fellingham
Worship Leader & Songwriter

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