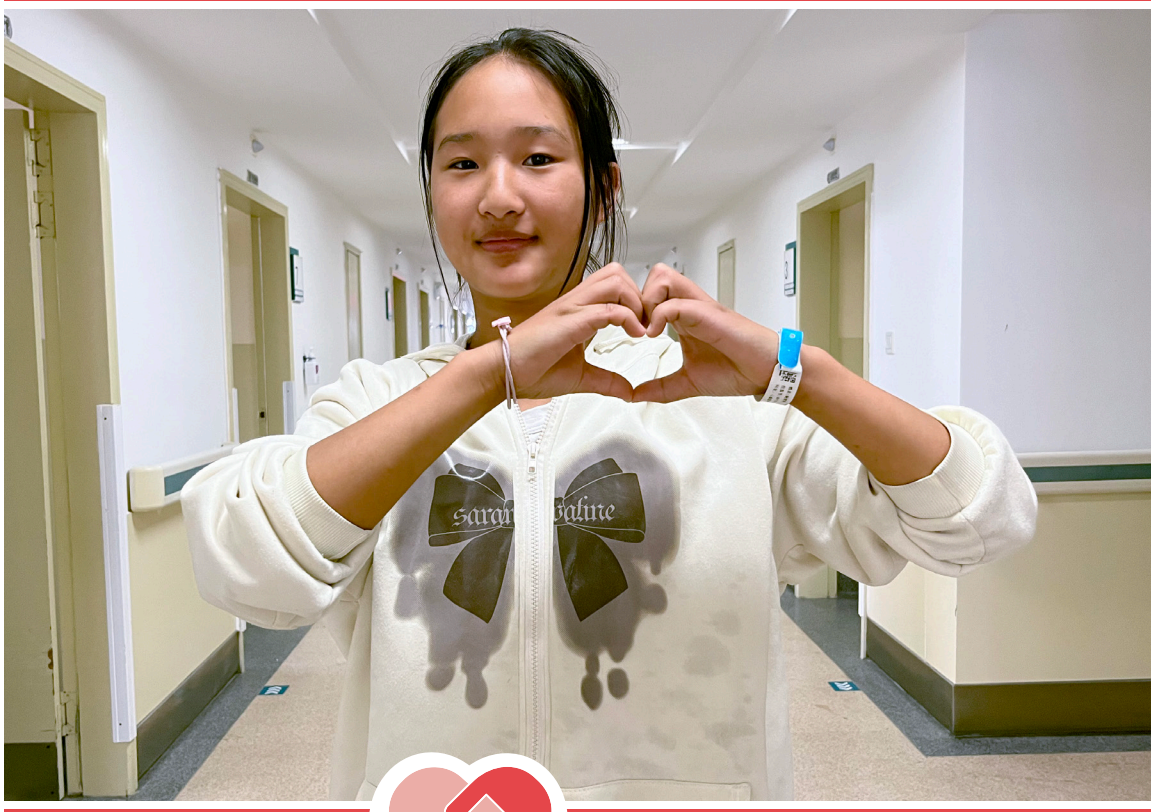

MY

HE RT

OF CHARITY



Welcome! We're so thankful that you've chosen to join us on this journey to continue deepening your beautiful heart of charity. Through these devotions and journaling opportunities, you will learn to love God completely, yourself correctly, and others compassionately. We hope and pray that you will be inspired, encouraged, and blessed as you work through these pages. Please enjoy your journey.



DAY 1

LET'S GROW IN *Love* TOGETHER

Love your neighbor as yourself.

—Mark 12:31

“Charity is the form, mover, mother and root of all the virtues.”

—Thomas Aquinas

What's the first thing you think of when you hear the word charity? Maybe an organization or a fundraiser? Perhaps giving money? Generosity? While those associations have become common in our society, charity has a deep and rich heritage that goes much deeper. Let's take a moment to examine the word charity.

The word “love” in most of our modern versions of the Bible represents many different words for love from the original Greek that it was written in. These include romantic, family, and friendship types of love. One of those Greek words, *agape*, can also be translated as charity.

So, charity means love. The words charity, *agape*, and love can be used interchangeably.

In the King James Bible, which is the oldest version typically read today, rather

than use the word love in I Corinthians 13:13 it says, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” Beyond that, the entire chapter of I Corinthians 13, often called the “love” chapter, actually uses the word charity, coming from the original word agape. “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not.” In fact, you can find this word throughout the New Testament.

Agape, or charity, represents God’s kind of love. It is an altruistic sort of love. A love that thinks of others before self. A love that is more of an action than just a feeling. A love that is unconditional. So, the origin of the word charity is rooted in this deep and abiding sort of love.

God’s love was best shown when He gave His own Son for us. As the famous John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” In response to

His overwhelming gift, His followers strive to emulate His love, to love Him in return, and pass His love along to others. This is a true heart of charity.

Charity should
be at the core of
who we are. It
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Love moving in us,
through us, and
out of us, touching
everyone we come
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Historically, the church has viewed charity as the ultimate perfection of the human spirit. Charity should be at the core of who we are. It should become our very essence. Love moving in us, through us, and out of us, touching everyone we come in contact with.

Operation Blessing has been dedicated to demonstrating God’s love by alleviating human suffering for over 45 years. In this devotional series, we’ll be sharing some of the things we’ve discovered about charity along the way. We hope they will inspire you to embrace charity in all its many facets,

growing closer to your Heavenly Father and your friends and neighbors through the process.

Today, we looked at love as the central component of charity. Next, we will be talking about how compassion plays a central role in charitable love.

LET'S GROW IN *Love* TOGETHER

How do I currently best show love? How would I explain the connection between love and charity?
In what ways could I grow in charitable love?

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And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

–Colossians 3:14



DAY 2

PUTTING *Compassion* **INTO ACTION!**

**Put on then, as God's chosen ones,
holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness,
humility, meekness, and patience.**

—Colossians 3:12

**“No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a
piece of the continent, a part of the main.”**

—John Donne

Thank you for joining us as we discover more about charity together. Deep in the heart of charity, we find compassion. Simply defined, compassion involves the ability to recognize suffering in others along with a desire to alleviate their pain.

True compassion begins by opening our eyes to the plight of others around us, just as Christ saw and recognized the hurting people He came to serve. Compassion recognizes the dignity and value of those who suffer, and then seeks connection with them in hopes of sharing the burden.

A compassionate heart realizes that, in some ways, we as humanity are all part of one collective. If one of us suffers, we all suffer. It understands that you and I can never fully find peace and joy unless we reach out and offer peace and joy to others as well.

Putting compassion into action and alleviating suffering can take on many different forms. It can involve comforting—as through a hug, a gentle response, or a shoulder to cry on. From there it may move on to empowering others with an encouraging word, affirmation of their worth, or validation of their dignity. It can also provide practical assistance, financial help, and physical relief. Ultimately, compassion leads to rescuing, protecting, and advocating for the hurting as we seek justice on their behalf.

The Good Samaritan, who Jesus spoke of in Luke 10, provides an excellent example of compassion. He saw a man in need, recognized his suffering, felt a connection with him, and his compassion moved him to take decisive action. Martin Luther King Jr., another man of great compassion, offered this summary of the story: “The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But the good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

True compassion
can be radically
powerful—a catalyst
for lasting change.

Just as we work to foster and grow this biblical view of the people around us, we must also guard against compassion’s enemies. Fear can be an enemy of compassion, as it keeps us focused on our own security and makes us afraid to risk reaching out to others. Moral outrage can be an enemy of compassion. In this case, a person can become so focused on correcting morality that they lose sight of the hurting souls involved. And pride is an enemy of compassion, tricking a person into thinking that those who suffer are somehow not as good as they are, and that they might deserve their misfortune.

True compassion can be radically powerful—a catalyst for lasting change. It provokes kindness and goodness in ourselves and others. It gives the hurting a safe place to grow and thrive. People who excel at extending compassion also develop resilience. They feel the pain of others deeply but can turn that into a positive action.

And we’ll leave you with a fun fact: Being compassionate is healthy for you too! Studies have shown that among other benefits, compassion can increase longevity, decrease stress, and improve immune function. Not to mention, it can bring a lot of love, joy, and peace into your life.

So, let’s embrace compassion in all its beauty and power today.

PUTTING *Compassion* INTO ACTION!

How do I compare with the definition of a compassionate person?

Does anything hinder me from compassion? What are new ways I can demonstrate compassion?

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And when the LORD saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”

–Luke 7:13



 **DAY 3**

Humility **CREATES CONNECTION**

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

—1 Peter 5:5

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”

—C.S. Lewis

You may remember that we recently discussed pride being an enemy of compassion and charity. And what’s the opposite of pride? Humility, of course! Which brings us to another incredible virtue that will fuel you toward having a heart of charity.

When people are prideful, they might look at the less fortunate with pity, as if they are inferior beings. They might even offer them some assistance—especially if it makes the giver look good or increases their status. But those gifts offered without true compassion can quickly undermine the recipient’s dignity and self-worth.

However, when charity is undertaken from a humble heart, it does the exact

opposite. A humble person will look at the less fortunate and identify with them. They will realize that given a health issue, a family tragedy, an addiction problem, a few poor decisions, or a natural disaster, they could have ended up in a similar painful situation. This person acknowledges that none of us is worthy on our own—only through Christ.

“If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”

—Mother Teresa

They also understand that at some point in their own life, chances are they will need someone’s assistance, a helping hand, to make it through. And when that time comes, they hope others will reach out to them with kindness, dignity, and respect as well. Or as Jesus famously said in Matthew 7:12, “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.”

That sort of mindset creates a true connection between the giver and the recipient, whether that recipient is a homeless person near their neighborhood or an orphaned child on the other side of the globe.

Humility also does battle against another enemy of compassion that we discussed: moral outrage. Moral outrage is a close relative of pride. As Mother Teresa once said, “If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”

For example, someone might look at a struggling single mother and think that if she’d made better choices, she wouldn’t be in that place. However, they truly have no idea what circumstances brought her low. She could have been victimized, her self-esteem might have been destroyed during her childhood, or maybe she never had anyone to guide her. We just don’t know.

The morally outraged might look at a downtrodden father and decide that he’s lazy. But they don’t know about the health crisis, abuse, gang violence, or government corruption that dragged him to the depths of despair.

Assistance given from this heart of pride is likely to involve a heaping helping of judgment and a criticism that will further discourage and demoralize the recipient. No wonder so many people are wary of accepting charity!

Yet so many truly need a helping hand. That’s why the Bible tells us in I Peter 5:5, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

Sometimes the hurting need a hand out in the short term, but more often they need a hand up out of their despair and onto firmer footing. They need someone to believe in them and partner with them as an equal. Someone to help them rebuild their home after a hurricane, support them during a health crisis, supply clean water that will uplift their community, or offer them skills training that will allow them to earn a better income.

This brings us right back to that true core of charity—love. A humble love that recognizes the inherent worth in every human soul.

Humility **CREATES CONNECTION**

How can humility help me to grow in charity? How can it help me to connect with others? In what ways am I currently humble, and in what ways could I strengthen this area?

[illegible]

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

–Micah 6:8



DAY 4

THE DELICATE BALANCE OF *Selflessness*

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

—Philippians 2:3-4

“Life is an exciting business, and most exciting when it is lived for others.”

—Helen Keller

If you're anything like us, the idea of becoming more selfless could seem a bit overwhelming. Most of us at Operation Blessing are already caring and empathetic people. But we're also still works in progress, and growing in selflessness is an important aspect of becoming more like Christ and developing a heart of charity. So, let's take a moment to look at both what selflessness is—and what it isn't.

Selflessness is caring more about the needs of others than your own needs. It's closely related to the Christian concept of dying to self. Christ exemplified a life of selflessness, even to the point of giving His life for us on the cross. As followers of Christ, serving the needs of others should become a high priority in our lives.

However, many biblical principles require balance to be properly expressed: grace and truth, justice and mercy, God's omniscience and our free will, just to name a few. While not mentioned as often, selflessness and self-care can also work together powerfully.

While some of us don't press far enough into selflessness, others try too hard and end up burnt out or even wounded from extending themselves for people who take advantage of their well-meaning hearts. And still others of us have focused on a works-based salvation to an unscriptural degree, neglecting God's grace. A balance is needed.

On airplanes, flight attendants always tell us to put on our own oxygen mask before assisting others. Similarly, counselors are famous for saying you can't love others until you properly love yourself. Most Christians will agree that we are to put God first and our families second before reaching out

to others. It's also true that we're to care for our own body, mind, and spirit through proper nourishment, rest, and time spent with the Lord.

Christ exemplified a life of selflessness, even to the point of giving His life for us on the cross.

Did you know that rest is a Biblical commandment? Something we're told to strive after? It's clear that God doesn't want us to only care for others to the detriment of ourselves. While there can be exceptions, notice that even the Scripture above says, "Let each of you look not **only** to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." In addition, Jesus says in Mark 12:31, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." These both seem to assume that we will naturally look to take care of ourselves as well.

Galatians 6 tells us to "bear one another's burdens," meaning that sometimes our burdens are just too heavy to carry by ourselves. But shortly thereafter it also tells us that "each will have to bear his own load." This points out that we're also each responsible for pulling our own weight—when and if we're able to.

In a previous lesson we learned that the enemy of compassion is fear. Let's not let fear keep us from being selfless and reaching out. God can lead us and give us wisdom. He promises that His strength is made perfect in our weakness—that His burden is easy and His yoke is light.

THE DELICATE BALANCE OF *Selflessness*

Do I lean too far, in either direction, toward selfishness or selflessness? Why is self-care important? How can God help me to balance blessing others and taking good care of myself?

[illegible]

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

–Galatians 6:2



DAY 5

Extending **YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE**

**I have become all things to all people, that by all means
I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel,
that I may share with them in its blessings.**

—I Corinthians 9:22-23

**Throw a stone into the stream and the ripples that
propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all influence.**

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Each of us has been gifted by God with a sphere of influence. While it could be easy to get trapped into the mindset of focusing on ourselves and our immediate families, a heart of charity calls us to extend that sphere. We're to offer the good news and blessings to everyone we encounter.

God has designed us each as a unique individual, with special talents and

characteristics. We all display differing aspects of His expansive image, together reflecting His glory. God created us to work together within communities. And within those communities, each of us has a unique impact on our world. As we extend ourselves to those around us, the blessings we offer radiate outward from us like ripples in a pond. Each life we touch can in turn touch many others.

While fallen humanity might have developed into tribal mindsets over time, embracing a philosophy of “us” versus “them,” God calls us outside of our comfort zones. In Him “there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” There is no room in the Christian heart for racism, sexism, or classism. No room to hate those from other religions, political parties, or philosophical backgrounds.

Remember that Good Samaritan from when we discussed compassion? Did you know that he came from a people group at odds with the Jews? That’s why Jesus highlighted the man’s ethnicity in the story. How easy would it have been for the Good Samaritan to pass by the hurting victim, lying beaten on the road? Instead, the Good Samaritan connected with that man, putting aside their differences and focusing on their shared humanity. He extended his sphere of influence, offering mercy, kindness, and generosity—quite possibly saving a life.

Similarly, we must stretch beyond ourselves to connect with a broader world. We can accomplish this in many ways. It could be something as simple as trying a new hobby, visiting a new city, or inviting a new family over to dinner. From there we might try hosting an international student, attending a community event, or forging connections between local churches of varying denominations. Eventually we might try traveling abroad, living in a new culture, or taking part in an overseas mission trip.

All of these are ways of increasing our understanding of others, developing greater empathy, and making new connections. Even if you can’t go overseas yourself, you could always get involved with an organization that does, such as Operation Blessing, extending your influence in that way. As the organization reports back to you about the good work you’ve helped accomplish, you’ll feel connected to those that you’ve blessed. And they will most certainly feel your love extending toward them.

We must stretch beyond ourselves to connect with a broader world.

We like to say that you can be the hands and feet of Jesus, reaching out to people in need. You have been created to bless your world. So let your love, and your life, extend outward like those picturesque ripples in a pond.

Extending YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Who does my current sphere of influence include?
How could I expand that? What group of people has God
put on my heart that I could reach out to in new ways?

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Behold, a great multitude that no one could number,
from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,
standing before the throne and before the Lamb,
clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.

–Revelation 7:9



DAY 6

BECOME A *Servant* **OF ALL**

**And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.
For even the Son of Man came not to be served
but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**

—Mark 10:44-45

“Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.”

—Booker T. Washington

Of all the concepts we’re examining in this series, perhaps serving is the most self-explanatory. We all know about the service industry, about serving your community, and about domestic servants.

However, it’s unlikely that many people dream of being servants. Kids tend to dream of becoming heroes, celebrities, and leaders when they grow up—not servants. Yet that’s exactly what Jesus came to earth to be. He came to be a servant of all, to give His life as a ransom for many, to seek and save the lost, to bring sight to the blind and healing to the sick. He even washed the feet of His

disciples in a humble act of service.

And so, to emulate Jesus, we must be willing to become servants as well. This is the nature of God's kingdom. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. To be great, you become a slave. To lead, you serve.

There are so many opportunities to serve; just stop and glance around you for a minute. You can serve your family, your church, your neighbors, or your community. This could mean babysitting for a weary single mother. It could be helping an

There are so many opportunities to serve; just stop and glance around you for a minute.

elderly person with chores, cleaning the side of the street, or handing out meals to the homeless. In the spirit of extending yourself, you can similarly serve in a far-off disaster zone or impoverished area.

In fact, nearly everything we've discussed so far connects to this

idea of serving. Love, compassion, humility, and selflessness all tie into serving others. While those are all attitudes—character traits—serving puts them into physical action. Through serving, we show our love and compassion to others by giving of our time and our physical energy in a way that is both humble and selfless.

We can also give of our gifts and talents through serving. That could mean tutoring a struggling child, making music to encourage the sick or elderly, or rebuilding a home after a hurricane. It could mean occasionally offering for free the skills we normally use at work in order to bless someone who couldn't otherwise afford those services.

Best of all, by serving we not only give of ourselves to others to alleviate their hurt and suffering, we also give of ourselves to God.

According to Matthew 25:34-40, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'" And, as the righteous ask when they've done these things, "the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"

Serving can also free you and give you joy. As you work to help those in need, it often puts your own challenges into perspective. Meanwhile, seeing the joy, the light, the gratitude, or the relief in the eye of someone you have blessed is sure to warm your heart.

And so, we encourage all of you to get involved in serving others—and serving your Father God in the process as well.

BECOME A *Servant* OF ALL

What are the ways I currently serve others? How can serving others help me to be more like Christ? How can I use my special gifts and talents to serve?

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**As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another,
as good stewards of God's varied grace.**

–1 Peter 4:10



DAY 7

Giving **FROM A GENEROUS HEART**

**In all things I have shown you that by working hard
in this way we must help the weak and remember the
words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said,
“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”**

—Acts 20:35

“It’s not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.”

—Mother Teresa

While giving might be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of charity, we haven’t actually discussed it much yet. That’s not to imply that giving isn’t important. In fact, it’s vitally important.

Giving blesses both the giver and the receiver. While the recipient is blessed through some sort of support, when the giver reaches out with a cheerful heart, they are filled with joy. Beyond that, the giver gains a sense of empowerment as they are enabled in some way, large or small, to improve their broken world.

Luke 6:38 even says, “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

This idea of giving also speaks to generosity. To be generous is to be liberal in your giving. But generous has another meaning as well: plentiful or large, a place of abundance. Our God is a generous God. Creation itself is an expression of God’s generous love. In the beginning, in God’s carefully crafted Eden, Adam and Eve lived in abundance. And when God’s creation fell, what did He ultimately do? As we discussed in our first lesson, He gave His Son for us so that we could have eternal life. That’s some amazingly powerful generosity! Now we can give out of a spirit of generosity and abundance as well.

Giving can occur in many forms: physical gifts, financial help, service, time, and emotion just to name a few. By giving, we acknowledge that ultimately God owns everything—our time, our money, all of it—and we’re more than willing to give some of His blessings back or pay them forward. And, God doesn’t judge the size of our gift, although He certainly values the extent of our sacrifice. In Luke 21, looking beyond the surface to the heart, Jesus counted the widow’s mite of only a few cents—offered out of her scarcity—as the most precious gift of all.

However, with so much need in the world, it might be hard to know where to start giving. Humanitarian organizations, including Operation Blessing, partner with friends like you to make the most of your charitable giving. You are the heartbeat that drives all the wonderful work they do, as they reach out to the poor and the needy.

Through such groups you can not only give a hand out, you can often give a “hand up.” An education, skills training, agricultural support, a small business, clean water, or life-changing medical care can put a hurting person on a whole new trajectory toward a brighter future—not only that person, but sometimes their family as well. By joining with like-minded givers, you can create a synergy that multiplies your gifts, rather than just adding them up. In many cases you can work together with others to transform an entire vulnerable community.

That’s the beauty and the power of giving. And that’s why we think it’s so incredible that you’ve chosen to dive deeper into a heart of charity with us.

By giving, we
acknowledge that
ultimately, God owns
everything—our time,
our money, all of it—
and we’re more than
willing to give some
of His blessings back
or pay them forward.

Giving

toward greater generosity in my own life?

[illegible]

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

–Proverbs 19:17



DAY 8

SPEAK UP FOR THE HURTING **THROUGH** *Advocacy*

**Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights
of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.**

—Proverbs 31:8-9

**“Every great dream begins with a dreamer.
Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience
and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”**

—Harriet Tubman

Think back a few discussions to when we talked about compassion and learned that, “Ultimately, compassion leads to rescuing, protecting, and advocating for the hurting as we seek justice on their behalf.” Now it’s time to delve into one of the most powerful forms of charity: advocacy.

An advocate is someone who pleads on behalf of another. Moving beyond serving

and giving, we can go even further by advocating for poor and hurting people. The term intercessor is closely related to advocate, and all of us can begin by advocating for those in need through intercessory prayer.

There are many other exciting ways we can get involved in advocating as well. Those with political or legal backgrounds might fight in government or the courts, seeking justice for the poor. Doctors and nurses can advocate for the sick, teachers for the forgotten, and police officers for the downtrodden within their given professions.

We all have another amazing tool for advocating right at our fingertips: social media!

You might sign up for some sort of run for charity, walk for awareness, or volunteer your time to help raise funds for others.

We all have another amazing tool for advocating right at our fingertips: social media! It might

seem too simple to be true, but just by sharing posts from your favorite charitable organizations, you can make a difference. In this way, you can shed light on the plight of hurting people and encourage your friends to get involved. Through the poignant images and messages, hopefully you can help awaken compassion and charity in the hearts of others as well.

Recently, crowdfunding has become an effective method of raising financial support for worthy causes as well. This is a great way you can join with others who have a similar passion for helping the hurting. Put together, small gifts add up and can make a big difference.

You can also advocate by setting up your own fundraiser on behalf of a cause. Many people start fundraisers for special events like birthdays in lieu of gifts. You could create a memorial fund. Or, you can simply begin a fundraiser because you believe so strongly in the cause.

Finally, you might not have thought of this before, but you can be an advocate for the hurting well into the future by considering a planned gift through your will or estate fund. This can allow you to leave a legacy and continue blessing the hurting long after you leave this earth.

One of our favorite Scriptures at Operation Blessing beautifully sums up what it means to have a heart of charity: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

Thank you for joining us on this journey to further develop your beautiful heart of charity. We sincerely hope it has blessed you, informed you, and inspired you.

SPEAK UP FOR THE HURTING THROUGH *Advocacy*

Have I ever been involved in advocacy? What are some ways I could advocate for the hurting? Are there any areas where I have special influence or ability to advocate for others?

[illegible]

But let justice roll down like waters, and
righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

–Amos 5:24



My Prayer

Father God, I thank you for your beautiful heart of charity. I'm so grateful that you offered the ultimate gift, the gift of your own Son Jesus on the cross. I embrace your gift, and I commit my life to you.

Help me to humbly live a life of love and charity, and to continue growing and developing in these areas.

Thank you for your heart of abundance toward your children. Please help me to live out of a place of abundance as well. Help me to live selflessly, yet wisely.

I pray that I will hear Your voice, and know when You would have me to reach out and bless others through giving, through serving, or by standing up for what is right in Your sight.

Extend my influence and expand my horizons, Lord, so that I can serve You effectively and be ready for whatever assignments You might send my way. I pray that You would bless me as I seek to bless my world.

In Jesus's name I pray, amen.



ABOUT US

Operation Blessing is a nonprofit, humanitarian organization dedicated to partnering with YOU to demonstrate God's love by alleviating human suffering. For more than 40 years, your love has shown through Operation Blessing in the U.S. and around the world.

Together we've provided hunger relief, medical care, clean water, and disaster relief to millions across the globe.

Through compassionate, efficient, and locally focused programs we are able to target the specific needs of those we serve. This gives our partners an opportunity to truly be the hands and feet of Jesus for those who are suffering and in need.

We pray that you will find new ways to spread a spirit of charity to help change your world for the better. May God bless you in all your endeavors.

Visit operationblessing.org to learn more and for all the latest news!

 **OPERATION
BLESSING**

