

February 24. Read Proverbs 14:31 Wait. Does that verse really say that? If we oppress the poor, we show contempt for God? Yes, mistreating the poor is equal to insulting their Creator. Wow. How often do we oppress the poor? The verse doesn't stop there; it goes on to say that whoever is kind to the needy honors God. Oppression of the poor is found everywhere, but it can be more severe in developing countries. Oppression and poverty isn't just a matter of economics, so it takes more than money to stop the devastating results. Children often receive the brunt of the oppression and are particularly vulnerable to the emotional and spiritual message of poverty. Poverty tells them they are worthless and of no value in the eyes of God or others. The oppression tells children they have no hope for the future. We can counter these messages with the truth of God's Word. Each child can know that he or she is of infinite value! Each one is unique and special in God's sight. There can be hope and a bright future when oppression is stamped out by kindness. Giving kids this hope is honoring to God!

February 25. Read Proverbs 19:17. Do you want to receive a reward from God? This verse says that whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them. It seems as if God repays the generous person for his or her kindness. The person in this verse saw the plight of a neighbor in need and stepped in to help. Their loan may have been a monetary gift or maybe it was a generous act of friendship. The poor can often not repay, but God has infinite resources. Please note that this is not a work we do to earn our salvation. Instead, it is a reward either in this life or a future reward from God. Two things are important here:

- The kindness is an act of compassion. 1 Corinthians 13:3 says, "If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." Love is the key. Helping the poor is of no use if it is done for selfish gain.
- God takes the kindness and considers it as if it were done to Him. He will reward the person for what he or she has done. We are not to look for temporary human praise. Instead, God will reward us far greater.

February 26. Read Proverbs 28:27. The imagery of this verse is astounding. How often do we close our eyes to the poor around us? When we do that, we receive no blessing. Instead, we receive many curses. Poverty is uncomfortable and sometimes it's easier to look away. It's easier to pretend we didn't see the lack—lack of hope, lack of worth. Just like this verse says, we close our eyes to the oppressed. Jesus looked people in need directly in the eyes. He saw them. He didn't turn His eyes away from poverty or illness. He stopped and gave people hope. He wasn't motivated by what people in need could offer Him. He had genuine love for them and wanted to help meet their needs—physical, emotional, and spiritual. He acted with compassion. See past the circumstances and discover the person. We can hurt with the hurting, cry with the grieving, and give to those in need. Remember, while poverty is uncomfortable, we have a choice. We can close our eyes or we can stop and truly look. We can see past the poverty and into the eyes of a person who needs compassion that Jesus can offer. Let's open our eyes and truly see.

February 27. Read Psalm 9:9. God is a refuge, a protected spot, for those who are oppressed. They can run to Him and be saved from trouble. The concept of a refuge gives the idea of a high rocky location that is not accessible. It is a location that is completely safe from approaching enemies. The oppressed are called to flee to His protection and away from those who are harming them. Knowing that God is our refuge enables us to trust Him freely. There is no situation that we encounter that is outside of His control. Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run into it and are safe." Does that mean that God will never lead us into difficult circumstances? No, but when God is our protection, we can face dangerous situations with confidence that God is there with us. He will never leave us or forsake us. He is our protection through all situations. No matter what our circumstances, God wants to be our refuge. If you are oppressed, run to Him and be safe. Allow Him to be your stronghold in times of trouble. Your refuge is waiting.

February 28. Read Psalm 9:17-18. This section of Psalm 9 reminds us that God does not forget about the needy. In this passage the "needy" refer to the humble worshipers of God who have been persecuted, abused, and exploited. Much of this persecution was coming as a punishment from the local leaders because of the people's faithfulness to God. David is calling on the oppressed people to sing in the midst of their suffering! He encourages them to sing to God who is on their side and He will fight their battles. These faithful followers are asking God to catch their enemies and send them to their graves. Then they are reminded that God will not forget them. God doesn't turn a blind eye to them. Instead, He gives them great assurance in this verse—the hope of the afflicted will never perish. Although the needy may become weary in their circumstances, their hope can be found in God. When we see believers suffering from persecution because of their faith, let's encourage them that God does not forget them. He sees their plight and will renew their hope. We can stand with them in this promise.