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## WEEK 5 DEVOTIONAL

The following is an excerpt from Robert D. Lupton's "Their is the Kingdom." Robert Lupton, educated and middle class, moved into a high crime area of Atlanta with the intention of bringing Christ's message into the neighborhood.

### "PLEASE SIT IN MY CHAIR"

She's sixty-six, mildly retarded, dangerously overweight, twice a great grandmother and a devoted mother of our church. She lives with four generations of extended family in an overcrowded, dilapidated house, but her buoyant spirit is undaunted. Since losing her youngest son in a senseless murder last Christmas Eve (he was short while riding with his uncle in a taxi cab), she has redirected much of her affection to me.

"You're my buddy," she says with a broad, snaggle-toothed grin. "I pray for you every day." Then she gives me a long bear hug. She wants to sit close beside me in every church service and although the smell of stale sweat and excrement is often nauseating, she makes me feel a little special. Her internal plumbing doesn't work as well as it used to, and she leaves tobacco smears when she kisses my cheek. But I am glad to have Mrs. Smith by my side.

She often hints, sometimes blatantly that she would like to come home with us for a visit. Nothing would delight her more than to have Sunday dinner with my family.

But there is a conflict. It has to do with values that Peggy and I learned from childhood. We believe that good stewardship means taking care of our belongings, treating them with respect, and getting long service from them. Our boys know that they are not to track mud on the carpet or sit on the furniture with dirty clothes. To invite Mrs. Smith into our home means we will have filth and stench soil our couch. There will be stubborn offensive odors in our living room.

My greatest fear is that she will want to sit in my new corduroy recliner. I wouldn't want to be rude and cover it with plastic to protect it from the urine stains. But I know it would never be the same again. Unknowingly, Mrs. Smith is forcing a conflict, a clashing of values, upon me.

Preserve and maintain. Conserve and protect. They are the words of an ethic that has served us well. Over time these values have subtly filtered into our theology. It is increasingly difficult to separate the values of capitalism from the values of the kingdom. Stewardship has become confused with insurance coverage, with certificates of deposit, and protective coverings for our stained glass. It is an offering, a tithe dropped into a plate to be used on ourselves and our buildings. Somewhere on the way to becoming rich we picked up the idea that preserving our property is preferable to expending it for people.

Why should it be so difficult to decide which is wiser: to open the church for the homeless to rest or to install an electronic alarm system to preserve its beauty?

Why should it be such a struggle to decide which is more godly: to welcome Mrs. Smith into my home and my corduroy recliner or to preserve the "homey aroma" of my sanctuary and get extra years of service from my furniture?

Is this not precisely the issue of serving mammon or God? How ingenious of our American version of Christianity to make them both one and the same.

We did finally invite Mrs. Smith to have Sunday dinner in our home. And she did just as I feared she would. She went straight for my corduroy recliner. And it never has been the same. In fact Mrs. Smith even joined a Bible study in our home the next week. Every Wednesday evening she headed right to my chair. She even referred to it as *her* chair!

I thank God for Mrs. Smith and the conflict she brings me. In her more clearly than in Sunday School lessons or sermons, I encounter the Christ of scripture saying, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me."

## MATTHEW 25:34-40

34"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, <sup>(AE)</sup>inherit the kingdom prepared for you <sup>(AF)</sup>from the foundation of the world. 35'For <sup>(AG)</sup>I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; <sup>(AH)</sup>I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36<sup>(AI)</sup>naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you <sup>(AJ)</sup>visited Me; <sup>(AK)</sup>I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40"<sup>(AL)</sup>The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, <sup>(AM)</sup>to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

## POSSIBLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you view your possessions? Do you believe that everything you own belongs to God? Or do you have a sense of entitlement over your belongings? What do you think it means to be a good steward of God's blessings? How have you or how have you not been a good steward of His resources?
2. Do you have a person in your life, like Mrs. Smith, who is difficult for you to love? Ask God for specific ways you can serve him or her this week. Spend some time listening to what He has to say. If you do not have anyone like this in your life, ask God to bring someone into your life that will challenge you to love and be generous even when it's difficult. After all, what is Christ like about only loving people who are like us?

## APPLICATION:

1. What is something you own that you can use to bless that person this week? Or what is an act of service you can do for him or her? How can you be hospitable to this person?
2. Go to homeless ministry! We meet at 3pm in front of Bruin Cafe every Friday. Feed and befriend Jesus in Westwood with us. Believe me, I get back so much more than I give every time I go.