



WE ARE SPEAKING
Devotional

7 Devotions
to Accompany the
Reformed Church in America's
We Are Speaking Statement

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Content Note: This devotional addresses topics of harassment, abuse, and sexual violence. While the goal of this devotional resource is to amplify these stories in a way that moves individuals and congregations to take action, some of these stories and biblical references may be difficult to read or listen to. If you find yourself struggling as you read, please reach out to a trusted individual for support and care.

Devotional Days 2-6 written by Rev. Dr. Denise Kingdom Grier.



Rev. Dr. Denise Kingdom Grier is the pastor of mobilization and renewal at Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan. She is also RCA Global Mission's coordinator for Setshabelo Family and Child Services in the Free State Province in South Africa. Rev. Dr. Grier graduated from Western Theological Seminary with both the master of divinity and doctorate of ministry degrees. She is a longtime student of the Word who brings dynamic and prophetic insights to her preaching, teaching, and pastoral life. She lives in Holland, Michigan, with her daughter Gezelle, son Chris, and doggie-woggie Kgabani.

Devotional Days 1 and 7 written by Rev. April Fiet.



Rev. April Fiet is a pastor, writer, and blogger. She co-pastors the First Presbyterian Church in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, with her husband, Jeff, and together they are raising two children. April holds degrees from Wheaton College and Western Theological Seminary. She is the author of the book *The Sacred Pulse: Holy Rhythms for Overwhelmed Souls* and the e-book *Whispers in the Wilderness: 7 Devotions of Hope for Uncertain Times*. Connect with her at AprilFiet.com.

Devotion I

The Image of God

Read Genesis 1:26-27

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

A Lesson

God created the heavens and the earth, and all of it was good. The plants, the animals, the sky, and the stars all moved and worked together in harmony. The creation of the first human was good, too, but one thing was not good: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (Genesis 2:18).

God created woman to be man’s partner, and the author of Genesis urges us to remember that all humankind, male and female are created in the image of God. Each person is an image bearer of God, worthy of love, kindness, respect, and compassion.

We are speaking out to end harassment, abuse, and sexual violence because these things diminish the image of God in others and harm those God created and loves.

Devotion I

The Image of God

Prayer

Creator and creative God, you made each person in your image and you celebrate the goodness of your creation. Help us to receive the truth that we are your beloved children, and empower us to embrace the belovedness of each person you have made. In Jesus's name. Amen.

A Faithful Response

Breathe in and remember that your very breath comes from God. This same breath that is in you is also in all humankind. As you breathe, ask God to help you offer love, kindness, dignity, and respect to each person you encounter today.

If a situation arises in which the image of God is being diminished in someone, consider how you might respond. Practice speaking up for others and for yourself.

Devotion 2

Avert the Eyes

Read John 8:4-8

“Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.”

A Lesson

She stood before Jesus, naked as the day she was born, or perhaps more so, if such was possible. Her nakedness was not only of her body but of her soul, for she had been snatched from the bed of another who was not her husband. She was caught in adultery. The religious leaders brought her before Jesus as an object lesson.

Lots of ink has been spilled trying to explain what Jesus was writing on the ground. In truth, we don’t know because the text is silent. The Scripture, however, is clear about one thing: Jesus does not look up. He refuses to add his eyes to the eyes of shame that gaze on her with judgment.

Devotion 2

Avert the Eyes

The leaders have created a spectacle, and Jesus would have none of it. Instead, he was content to avert his eyes to the ground and to speak the truth. No one is beyond sin and, therefore, no one wants eyes of shame on them when they are in a vulnerable state. Those situations are the moments when we need words of grace and the promise of forgiveness to wash over us and point us toward a new and promising future in obedience to Christ.

A Story

Folded arms and side-eye glances in her direction did nothing but entrench the shame she already felt. Fourteen years old and looking for something that felt like love led to two pink lines and a child to be born in a few months. Her church had a way of dealing with this kind of thing. She had seen it before and knew full well what she would have to submit to.

Her Sunday had come, when she would have to take the walk of shame up the center aisle to stand before the entire church and confess the sin of being pregnant out of wedlock. The eyes would all be upon her, that of judgment, disgrace, and shame, from the choir stand to the ushers at the door. Her sentence would be pronounced: she would no longer be able to sing in the choir, dance on the praise team, or attend youth group lest her sins infect the other teens around her. The eyes of shame would stare her down until the baby was born and she was able to appropriately confess her sin and seek the pardon of the church.

Devotion 2

Avert the Eyes

Some variation of this practice lived in churches of all ecclesial backgrounds and traditions. A pregnant woman, like the woman caught in adultery, would stand accused of sexual sin while the man who participated with her remained unchecked. Jesus sees all the variations of sin in our congregations and rejects our hierarchy by diverting the eyes of all humanity back to their own transgressions and away from the vulnerability of the ones whose sins might be more obvious.

Prayer

All-Seeing God, you see us and you know us, yet you don't judge by what you see, but see us through the prism of your Son. We confess we have cast our eyes of shame upon those who falter and miss the mark; meanwhile, we also miss the mark. Forgive us, God, and let us seek their forgiveness, too. Help us to avert our eyes of shame and be the first to drop the stone of condemnation and the first to tell of our salvation. For your glory. Amen

A Faithful Response

Find a stone. Stones have been used as markers, memorials, and memories. Write on the stone *No Shame*. Think of a person in your church, family, or community whose actions make it easy for you to cast shame on them. Put your stone in a place to help remind you that we are all worthy of condemnation, but are covered with grace when we follow Christ.

Devotion 3

Outrageousness

Read Genesis 34:25-27

“On the third day, when they were still in pain, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and came against the city unawares, and killed all the males. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and went away. And the other sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled.”

A Lesson

Shechem was the son of the leader of the entire community. He was described as the most honored among his father’s family, a real stand-up guy, except for one thing: he abducted and raped Jacob’s daughter Dinah, and in some insidious way “fell in love” with her. Her brothers, of course, were outraged and devised a plan that would result in the total demise of Shechem and his people.

A Story

She was pulling into her driveway late one night and didn’t see him. He was riding his bike in the dark with no light. As she turned, he appeared out of what seemed like nowhere, and she barely missed clipping his bike with her car. Before she could offer an apology for what could have happened, he threatened that her transgression would justify him should he “take” some part of her in a sexually violent act.

Devotion 3

Outrageousness

With pepper spray as her only weapon, and the covering of night as a possible enemy, she hastily made her way into her house to lock the door before spilling to the floor for what could have been.

This man was outraged by what could have possibly happened to him, but there was no one to be outraged about what could have happened to her. The simple fact that a minor traffic-related oversight could have cost her virginity, her dignity, and her mental stability was outrageous. At that moment, she lamented that there were no men in her church she could think of calling, men who would not just express sorrow for her, but who would be truly outraged at this incident. She needed a brother in Christ who would stand with her in her anger and pain, poised to confront the culture of sexual assault with the level of outrage Dinah's brothers expressed for their sister.

Disclaimer: This is not to sanction the method employed by the brothers but simply to amplify the passion and indignation with which they employed their methods.

Prayer

O Christ, our Savior and Brother, open the eyes of all men who bear your name to see your daughters truly as their sisters. May they accompany them with kindness. Walk with them in solidarity and escort them to the mercy seat where your justice, righteousness, and goodness prevail. Amen.

Devotion 3

Outrageousness

A Faithful Response

Gather a coalition of men in your church/community to watch Darkness to Light, a 2.5 hour evidence-based training on child abuse prevention, reporting, and other related resources. The training is available at <https://www.d2l.org>. Discuss next steps with your newly gathered coalition.

Devotion 4

Breaking the Violence of Silence

Read Genesis 29:25-27

“When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?’ Laban said, ‘This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.’”

A Lesson

The deal was clear. Jacob would work for seven years, and at the end, he would get Rachel as his wife. The time had come, but Laban had his own plan that complied with a local custom that apparently had been embedded in the fine print of the contract Jacob had signed. Alas, the morning after his wedding night Jacob found her there, Leah, not Rachel, victim of the violence of a father who objectified her and a culture that could not protect her.

Leah has no voice in this matter. The text doesn't offer any protest from her lips to her father nor any vocal revelation as she lay in darkness with her sister's beloved. But when she speaks, she uses the only means she has to tell her story: the names of her children.

Devotion 4

Breaking the Violence of Silence

"Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben, for she said, 'Because the Lord has looked on my affliction, surely now my husband will love me.' She conceived again and bore a son and said, 'Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also,' and she named him Simeon. Again she conceived and bore a son and said, 'Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons'; therefore he was named Levi." (Genesis 29:32-34, NRSVUE)

Leah used the means at her disposal to break the silence of the violence and stand in the light of her own truth.

A Story

He didn't mean for the story to get out. He shared the details of his abuse with his girlfriend in a tender moment. She was far enough from the incident and the perpetrator that it couldn't possibly be leaked. It would ruin the family if it got out. They would excommunicate him and stand with the perpetrator. After all, his record was tarnished and reputation marred by ill-gotten gains.

Then, in a moment of spite, she made the call and leaked his story, sending the family into a tailspin they wouldn't soon recover from. The only thing he could think was: how could she do it? *How could she break his silence?*

Devotion 4

Breaking the Violence of Silence

He tiptoed toward the light to see how his family would respond. They leaned in and listened. He was surprised. They offered him grace. He received it with gratitude. They led him to the light until he was able to stand there himself and tell his story to the authorities. Justice could be served and silence would be muted forever.

Prayer of Confession

Great Light of Lights, we have upheld the shadows to maintain something that seems like peace but is not. We whispered when a shout was necessary. We have let perpetrators thrive and victims be diminished by our closed mouths. Lord, have mercy on us until our hearts break and souls ache for those who suffer in our silence. Then, will you give us courage to say what we see and do what you say? For the healing of the survivor, for courage for the silent observer, and for the glory of your name. Amen.

A Faithful Response

As an act of repentance, place a sign to break the silence for the future. The sign asks whoever reads it: "Is someone telling you to be quiet about something that is hurting you?" If so, it invites them to tell someone they trust today. Churches can decide if they have a designated person to report to (the designated person should not be the pastor, although the person could choose to tell the pastor if they wish to). Schools might designate a guidance counselor.

Devotion 4

Breaking the Violence of Silence

These designations are merely options, but the main point is to break the silence for one's self. The simple act of telling one person can open a window to further reporting and ultimately lead to freedom and justice for victim and perpetrator.

This sign could be a poster laminated and placed in public places or in restrooms. It could be made into a magnet for members, youth group participants, etc. to put on their fridge at home, or even made into stickers that could be distributed broadly.

Devotion 5

Mother to Son

Read Proverbs 31:1-3, 8

“The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him:

No, my son! No, son of my womb!

No, son of my vows!

Do not give your strength to women,
your ways to those who destroy kings. ...

Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.”

A Lesson

There is no end to the striving to live up to the impossible standard set for women in the typical understanding of the Proverbs 31 woman. She is the perfect wife, mother, and woman.

Young girls in Sunday school and older women reading pink-flowered devotionals are urged to be this woman, for she is the standard by which true holiness is measured.

Women in churches have lost their agency and quite literally their minds trying to live up to this figurative biblical figure.

However, there is a more important fact often overlooked in the explanation of this text. This is, in fact, not God telling women to live up to this standard. This is a mother talking to her son, a king, about what kind of man he ought to be and the characteristics he should and shouldn't pursue in a wife.

Devotion 5

Mother to Son

A Story

Knock, knock. A familiar sound that always melts the heart. “Can I sleep in your room tonight?” His sweet three-year-old voice whispers to a closed door. His sister is on the other side; she’s five. They have slept together practically every night since he vacated the crib, and yet he doesn’t know if tonight will be different from last night when she said, “Yes.”

He waited outside of the closed door, eager for her response, knowing his mother would neither predict nor demand what the sister’s answer would be tonight. They reminded him that it was her room, her bed, and only she could decide whether to consent to her little brother’s plea. Tonight, she gave her consent, and he crawled into the comfort of her embrace, grateful to rest until tomorrow when he would have to ask again as if for the first time.

In the times of the kings, the names of the mothers of kings would often be listed alongside their sons. In those days, kings had many wives, and often their father had many children, but the king only had one mother, and she was usually his chief advisor. One could often determine what a king’s reign would be based on the reputation of his mother, and his reign often reflected the disposition of the same.

Devotion 5

Mother to Son

Today, sons hear the messages their mothers tell their sisters about how not to dress to avoid assault or how to act to get a good husband. Many boys internalize these messages to believe that if a girl dresses a certain way, she is asking for whatever befalls her, and if she is to be his wife, she better match the instruction his mother gave to his sister.

It's time for parents of sons to formulate a plan for how to talk about the mixed messages we send to girls and to elevate important matters such as the value of consent in intimate relationships. In a nutshell, if we don't teach our sons not to rape, they will likely rape.

It's also time for the church that told women to be like the Proverbs 31 woman to tell men, with matched intensity, to be the Proverbs 31 man.

Prayer

Compassionate God, you teach us and instruct us in the ways we should go. Help us teach and raise up boys and young men who will embody respect, trust, and love in their relationships. Remind us that each person is created in your image and we can love you by caring for the people you have placed in our lives. Amen.

Devotion 5

Mother to Son

A Faithful Response

Write a letter to your son(s) or the young men in your life, challenging societal norms for boys and men, elevating the value of consent, and praying for him/them to be the best version of a Proverbs 31 man that he/they can be with God's help.

Devotion 6

Let Them Mourn

Read Judges 11:36-37

“She said to him, ‘My father, if you have opened your mouth to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the LORD has given you vengeance against your enemies, the Ammonites.’ And she said to her father, ‘Let this thing be done for me: Grant me two months, so that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I.’”

A Lesson

Jephthah’s daughter went into the wilderness with her friends to grieve what she would never have. Her father had made a vow that ultimately would result in him offering his only daughter as a sacrifice. In volume 3 of the *She Is Called Women of the Bible* study series, I encourage readers to think about the kinds of vows we make. God, time and again, throughout the Scriptures condemns the sacrifice of children, and yet, Jephthah insists on standing by a vow that would never have pleased God.

Upon learning of her impending doom, she doesn’t beg her father to spare her or plan her escape under the cover of night. She asks of him one thing: “Please let me go and mourn my virginity with my friends and then I will return and you can fulfill your vow to sacrifice me to your God.”

Devotion 6

Let Them Mourn

A Story

Jephthah's daughter sat in the pew centuries later but had been given no place in the church to mourn her loss. Her innocence had been stolen, her essence awakened, and her perspective distorted. The entire community knew her story. It had made the local news. Suspects were apprehended, conspirators had been revealed, and the details of her assault paraded down Main Street.

And she had been given no place in the church to mourn her loss. Prayers for healing and help never accompanied her name in the prayers of the people. The prayer of confession never uttered an ounce of complicity from a community that quietly knew but failed to protect. And she had nowhere in the church to mourn her loss.

Prayer

Forgive us, Lord, for shying away from the loss and pain of others. In the story of Jephthah's daughter, you show us the way of making space for others to grieve what was taken from them. Help us to make our churches sanctuaries for those who are hurting. Help us to confront our own discomfort with the pain of others so that we do not impede the mourning and grief our siblings need in order to be set free. Amen.

Devotion 6

Let Them Mourn

A Faithful Response

The church is the place for people to go to for emotional and spiritual healing. Let us claim this as our reasonable service to God and the community where you have been placed. Create a space for survivors of abuse to grieve their loss. Here are some possible options:

*Provide a contemplative space where, once per month, survivors can light candles and read prayers of healing together and/or alone.

*Designate a Sunday each year in October during Domestic Violence Awareness Month to pray for healing for survivors of gender-based violence and sexual assault, and include prayers for the church to learn to be a place of healing.

*Use your benevolence fund to contract with a local therapist who does trauma-informed work (not just talk therapy) to provide counseling sessions for people in your congregation who need to grieve their loss but cannot otherwise afford the services.

Devotion 7

Stewarding Treasure

Read Isaiah 35:1-2a, 6b

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. ... For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.”

A Lesson and a Story

After an unusual rainfall, the Atacama desert in Chile was exploding with blossoms. The usually desolate area was overwhelmed with colors and flowers, which caught the attention of many people. Typically, the Atacama desert is a seemingly unending sea of browns and taupes. But, after the rain came, purples, greens, and whites appeared, and people were marveling over its transformation.

In response, the president of Chile announced that the area would be protected as a new national park. The exact boundaries of the national park weren't yet determined, as environmental scientists worked to identify the boundaries of the flowering desert, but it was clear that this was a treasure in need of stewarding.

Devotion 7

Stewarding Treasure

Chile's environment minister Maisa Rojas stated that it was important for people to, “respect the desert even in its dormancy... because the seeds and bulbs are still there waiting for the new cycle”

(<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/29/desert-bloomed-in-chile-atacama-driest-place-on-earth>).

Likewise, we must speak out against abuse, harassment, and sexual violence because each person is worth protecting and stewarding. By committing ourselves to the values of our Christian faith, and the convictions of the We Are Speaking statement, we are taking steps to steward the treasure of each person God has created.

Prayer

Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, you have created each person in your image, and you have called us good. Sometimes, we feel like the parched desert. We have been wounded, or we are weary from the work of seeking justice for our brothers and sisters. Send your Holy Spirit like the streams in the wilderness, so that we might bloom and thrive and show the world the beauty of your coming reign. Amen.

Devotion 7

Stewarding Treasure

A Faithful Response

These devotionals may have brought many thoughts and emotions to the surface. Take a moment to care for yourself and to listen to your heart and your body. Allow God's Holy Spirit to wash over you and bring you peace and healing.

May you rest assured that the work you are doing is to the glory of God, and may you also receive the rest and restoration of Jesus, who is engaged in this work with you.



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