

2021 Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional

As with all of you, 2021 has been a dynamic year for Midwest Food Bank. We continued to see COVID-19 issues in our nation and world. Winter storms, flooding and hurricanes kept us busy with Disaster Relief.

MFB continues to help those struggling with food-insecurity, thanks to the solid support of our donors and volunteers. Generous donors stepped up and provided funds to support our operations. Dedicated volunteers gave of themselves in the service of others. Prayer warriors covered our operations in prayer. These, combined with the blessings of God, have allowed the Midwest Food Bank mission* to be fulfilled.

To “Thank you,” we have developed a new Advent Devotional for 2021 to encourage our partners. We have included many distinct voices of MFB’s nonprofit partners, volunteers, board members, and employees. These aren’t all uniform - one day’s devotion will be different from the next. They are designed to display the unique hearts of people engaged in our mission.

It is our hope that these thoughts and prayers will be a blessing to all and encouragement for the days ahead. May God fill you with His wonder as we celebrate Jesus’ birth. Thank you for your support of the mission of Midwest Food Bank.

**As a faith-based organization, it is the mission of Midwest Food Bank to share the love of Christ by alleviating hunger and malnutrition locally and throughout the world and providing disaster relief; all without discrimination.*



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 28

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. - Luke 2:11 ESV

God came without trumpets or fanfare. The God who moved mountains, broke down walls, sent plagues upon Egypt, and turned cities into salt, was born small. God made Himself one of us. He desired such oneness with us, He gave up His power and His might to be born a babe in a manger. The Word was made flesh. God was born Man, and the angels celebrated.

The Christmas story does not end with the birth of Jesus Christ. The story of Christmas continues in each one of us as we continue to live our lives for Him. In our words and our actions, the gift of Christ on Earth continues to be shared.

Jesus' life has shaped the story of humanity and molds us into a more perfect creation. In how we handle tough times and when we remember to thank God for our best days, God's presence carries on.

During tradition and celebration, we have a duty to share the story. To feel God with us and to teach our children of Jesus' life amongst man. The greatest gift of Christmas is when we continue His story and His spirit. With it we will be prepared for the day He comes again.

When he comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed. - 2 Thessalonians 1:10 ESV

Prayer: God, With these words, I pray we're reminded of Jesus' birth, Your gifts to us through Him, and the story He began. May this season be filled with the same spirit of anticipation and expectation that started one night in a manger. Thank You for coming to us, walking with us, and showing us how to love throughout this season. Amen.

Allysha Nurdyke, MFB Employee

Midwest Food Bank *Advent Devotional*



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. - Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV

God's desire is for us to be as free as possible from ANYTHING that weighs us down from living the Christian life that best serves others and glorifies Him. This scripture reminds us to 'strip off' anything that might get in our way or tangle us up. Why do we need to do that? Because it is a distraction. If we worry about what other people think, or stress about situations we cannot control, then we are not giving God our full attention. He calls us to be ready ... to stand prepared.

In Hebrews 11, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Noah, and Moses, are all included in the "great cloud of witnesses" referenced in this verse. The initial promise by God (given in Genesis 3:15) is a Redeemer who would come and save humanity.

Jesus finished it at the cross for you and me, so we have been redeemed. Run with perseverance in that freedom. When we keep our eyes on Jesus, and we live by the Holy Spirit's power, we won't grow weary or become discouraged. We will persevere. We become, with Jesus, more than we can be on our own!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending Your Son to die on the cross so we could live in freedom. Father, some days this sinful world seems discouraging and overwhelming. I pray that I can keep my eyes fixed on You and know You did not intend for me to do life alone but to live by the Holy Spirit's power. You tell me You have a path marked out for me so, while the race is long, I know that if we follow the prepared path I will prevail. Father, I pray for strength, wisdom, and courage along the journey. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Katie Magwire, MFB Haiti Board Member

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- Philippians 4:6-7 ESV

This morning I woke up with my youngest son (Hudson) asleep next to me with his head on my chest and his hand holding my arm. It was a beautiful moment seeing him safe and in complete tranquility. It is an excellent picture of the peace I believe we all try to find. During his waking hours, Hudson is the opposite - constantly going, going, going. At times, we must encourage him to rest and be still. It's hard for him. Isn't it hard for us as well? We are also constantly moving, going, doing. And often, we can't shut our minds off. That is where prayer comes in. Let's lift it all to God in prayer rather than focusing on all we need to do.

"When we pray, we must remember three things. We must remember the love of God, which desires what is best for us, the wisdom of God, which knows what is best for us, and the power of God, which can bring about what is best for us. The result of believing prayer is that the peace of God will stand like a sentry on guard over our hearts. The word that Paul uses (phrourein) is the military word for standing on guard. That peace of God, says Paul, surpasses all understanding. - excerpt from Williams Barclay

Let's focus our hearts and minds in prayer in believing for God's peace in our own lives, families, neighbors, friends, nation, and world. Jesus stands guard over our hearts as we seek Him and Him alone. When we put it all in God's hands, we can lay our heads down in peace just like Hudson did with his Daddy.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for peace that passes all understanding. Please keep our hearts and minds focused solely on You. Be our sentry guarding our hearts and help us always to love and trust you, and believe that You will make a way. Amen.

Nate Westerfield, MFB Employee

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 1

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, Thus far the Lord has helped us.

- 1 Samuel 7:12 NIV

My family and I moved last year in the middle of the pandemic. As we were packing boxes and loading things in the moving van, I casually added four large stones to the pile of items to be loaded. My husband gave me an amused look but loaded them into the moving truck. It took a while to decide where to place them at our new home, but I finally landed on the landscape by the front door. They are my Ebenezer; each is a tangible stone that reminds me of a specific time that God helped me.

I have found that my Ebenezer's are like a physical hug from God. They help me refocus my mind to believe that God is there no matter what I face that day and He is helping me. The stones remind me that if I am going to reflect the love of God, I need to be a helper. I hope to go into each day with an attitude of providing valuable and vital help to those around me.

I try to get a glimpse of the stones every day when I leave our home to remind myself that God has helped me to this point. If you do not have an Ebenezer, I encourage you to get one.

Prayer: Lord, Remind me of Your love and Your faithfulness. Help me never to forget Your kindness and how Your love for me is beyond what I can wrap my mind around. Keep my eyes focused on You and not what is going on around me. Thank You for helping me through this life and covering me with Your grace and mercy. Help me to recognize when You place others in my life who need help so I can spread Your love in a tangible way. Amen.

Dana Williamsen, MFB Employee

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- Luke 12:34 NIV*

I am continually amazed by the hundreds and thousands of volunteers that provide countless hours of support for Midwest Food Bank. It's clear their treasure is in others and service to their community. They have a heart for helping, and they put that into action with their hands and feet. Midwest Food Bank has volunteers who pick up food, package food, store food, distribute food; and we also have volunteers who drive trucks, help with bookkeeping, write grants, organize fundraisers, prepare food for lunches, and serve on our boards.

Seeing this verse in application across all of the Midwest Food Bank locations is heartwarming and encouraging. It is an encouragement to hear their stories about coming to MFB and feeling appreciated, needed, and empowered. And it is a joy to see them focused on heavenly treasures.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, please bless the many volunteers, donors, and staff at Midwest Food Bank that have purposed in their hearts to serve You and help others through their actions in support of Midwest Food Bank. Keep them safe, provide for them, and bless them. In Your son's name, Jesus, Amen.

Eric Hodel, MFB Employee

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. - Isaiah 9:6 KJV

While giving birth to my first son, labor was so difficult, and the pain was intense; there were moments I wondered if I would survive. How could God allow someone to go through such pain in childbirth? As I began to focus on my mother, who had survived the birth of three, I suddenly became hopeful. I began to relax through each contraction. After giving birth, joy flooded my soul!

God has taught me over the years, suffering may endure for a time, but joy will come, and I am not without help. I have learned that I can focus on Jesus, the author and perfecter of my faith, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross. The shame and the pain He now sits at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for us. He is our great example, so as we celebrate the birth of our savior, let us focus on him and be reminded that we can experience great joy and peace no matter how painful and difficult this life can and will be.

Prayer: Father, my prayer for this season is that we always keep our focus on You in all the seasons of life so that the God of hope will fill us all with all joy and peace in believing so that the power of the Holy Spirit You will abound in hope and overflow with the confidence of Your promises. Thank You that You are always with us! Amen.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. - Romans 15:13 NIV

Rhonda Revels, MFB Texas Employee

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4

*Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
- Psalm 119:105 KJV*

Have you ever been on a mountain top, amazed at how far you can see? The vision is remarkable, and you can see it without much help. Maybe a pair of binoculars helps bring some far-away things into view, but the view is spectacular and inspiring. It feels close and touchable when it may be many miles away.

What about when you are in the valley, and it is dark, and the path is hard to see? It is quite a different view. Each step takes care and consideration. The view is much different than the mountain top. That is when we need the vision of the Word. Many times you will hear someone say as a last resort, "I turned to God when all else fails." It should be our first option, not our last resort.

When we trust in God, we get the most extended vision when in the deepest of challenges because we can see through God's eyes, not our own. His eyes see the path for victory, overcoming, hope, joy, and eternity. We often can only see the next step. Look to God always, and especially in the dark valleys.

I am sitting with my dad in a hospital room. He has just moved to hospice care. His eyes barely open, and when they do, they don't see very far. But the Word is in his heart, and Jesus is his Savior, so he has eternal vision. The Word has been his lamp and his light and will guide him to a heavenly home.

Is the Word lighting your path? Is it giving you hope and joy regardless of the circumstances? Whether you are on the mountain top or in the valley, the best way to get the best vision is to be in two positions, having your face down reading the Bible or down on your knees in prayer to God. Both places allow you to see the path ahead with a Heavenly view, the best view of all.

Jeff Niehouser, MFB Morton supporter

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

- Philippians 2:8 NIV

As I held my newborn grandson in my arms the day after he was born, I couldn't help thinking about what a blessing he is to our family and how amazing he is even though he can't give anything back to me. I love this child, and if necessary, I would gladly trade my life for his, but I wouldn't want to change places with him. I wouldn't want to go back to the state of being a newborn because I know what that entails. Our grandson cannot feed himself, change himself, control his bowels, and is completely dependent on others for his survival.

When I read Philippians 2: 1-9, I cannot help thinking about all Jesus gave up for us. When the passage states He made himself nothing, it means He willingly gave up everything He had known in eternity past to be born into humble circumstances. He was born a helpless infant in deplorable conditions. He was born to an oppressed people group, under circumstances that would have made Him an outcast among His own and chose a horrible death for your sake and mine.

As we focus on this advent season, I encourage each of us to ask the question, "how can I have the same mindset of Christ Jesus?" Jesus willingly endured the cross for me with humility and grace. He loved me first, so I could learn to love him. When I think of all He has done for me, how can I do any less than try to reflect His life to those I meet? I'm glad I don't have to do this on my strength and can rely on the strength of the all-powerful, gentle, mild, and humble Savior.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray You will show me how to live in humility, the same humility exhibited by Jesus, so I can honor You in all I do. I pray I will be the reflection of Jesus to others around me in this advent season and every day I live on earth. Amen.

Brett Humphrey, Sun Valley Community Church, MFB Arizona Supporter

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



MONDAY, DECEMBER 6

Looking back over the events of the past few years, I asked God what message He wanted me to share. He gave me the following: Let 2022 be a year of "God's increase."

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." Luke 17:5 NKJV

O Lord, "increase our faith", that we would not waver to the right or left, but we would keep our eyes fixed upon You, Lord, and not on the problems or cares of this world.

*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
- 1 Corinthians 13:13*

O Lord, help us to abide in the faithfulness of Your love and "increase the capacity of our hearts" to grow in compassion for the lost and hurting. Help us, O Lord, to extend Your light and be dealers of hope in this darkened world.

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct your paths. - Proverbs 3:6

O Lord, help me to seek Your guidance and wisdom for my life, that You would direct every step of my day; that I would stop and acknowledge all that You have done for me, forever grateful that You saved a wretch like me.

*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.
Proverbs 11:30*

Prayer: O Lord, help us to be "Your trees of Life," that we would be relentless at bringing new souls into Your kingdom. That we would speak Your word to a lost and hurting world with all boldness and power as it was intended, unashamed to proclaim Your glory and goodness. Thankful to be a servant of the King, Amen.

Tammy Paynter, MFB Arizona Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. - Acts 4:32-34 NIV

In all that we do in this life and particularly in extending a hand to assist the other person, we need the grace of God to excel and find satisfaction in the rather tiring work of helping another without expecting any return. That grace does not just come, but it is attracted when we are in one mind and heart working in total unity. We need to have a clear understanding that we are not our own but God's. Therefore, that which we have and can lay claim to is not our own, but we are stewards of God, to whom we will give an account for every work entrusted to us. With that knowledge, we can share with the needy freely, knowing that we possess nothing of our own, but all that we have comes from the Lord.

This secret made the rag-tag disciples of Jesus Christ (who were noted not only as fishermen but uneducated men) to be feared by all, including the leaders of their time. God powerfully demonstrated His presence in their lives with great signs and miracles. God is still the same today, and we can attract His grace by totally surrendering all we have as we continue to do the noble work of feeding the hungry.

Prayer: Mighty everlasting God, help each one of us realize we are only stewards of Your resources. As You give us an opportunity to serve and ensure that others have better lives, You will help us to do it without giving up, as You supply all our needs according to Your riches in glory. Amen.

Luke Jakoywa, Founder and Director, Sheepcare Community Centre, MFB East Africa Partner Agency

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. - Isaiah 9:6 NIV

Names are important. Every volunteer, agency representative, and employee at Midwest Food Bank is encouraged to wear a name tag. Each of us likes to be called by our name. We give our children names that often have a family connection even though they may not understand or immediately appreciate it. Last names bind families together, letting others know that those people are bound together either by blood or by vows.

When we call ourselves Christians, we tie ourselves to Jesus and fellow believers as a family bound by Jesus' blood and vows taken at baptism and confirmation. Christians come in all races, genders, nationalities, ages, and ethnic groups. What a diverse family we are! We may celebrate Christmas in many ways, but all acknowledge Jesus' birth as God being born into our human world full of sin and sinners. Thanks be to God for His patience with each of us.

Prayer: Lord, help us to remember that it is Your birthday that we celebrate at Christmas. Thank You for having the best name of all--Savior. Amen.

Jim Roy, MFB Georgia Advisory Board President

MidwestFoodBank *Advent Devotional*



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in heaven. – Matthew 5:16 KJV

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. – Colossians 3:17

Every day is an opportunity to be a blessing to others. I recently met with a young man who took the time to express his thankfulness. Three years after he had completed his community service hours at our facility, he took the time to come back and let us know what a difference it made in his life. He was treated with love and respect (not something he had experienced much of in his life up to that point), and the hours he spent here marked a turning point for him.

Sometimes I discount the power of a positive word or a small deed and the impact it can make on someone's day. But seemingly insignificant interactions can make a difference because when we allow God's light to shine through us, it shows people who God is. And once they start to see Him, they will want to know Him more.

I know that there are a lot of days that I need grace, and I find that grace is so much easier to offer when I am intentional about having a thankful heart.

Prayer: Thank You for the grace that You have given to me each day. Help me to look for ways to share Your grace with others. Thank You for Your amazing power and work in my life and the lives of those around me. Forgive me when I don't thank You enough for who You are, for all that You do, and all You have given. Help me set my eyes and heart on You and Your will for my life, and not the things of this world. All the praise and glory are yours, forever and ever. Amen.

Debi Petrillo, MFB Bloomington-Normal Employee

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10

We are living in very challenging times. The COVID-19 pandemic has left people dealing with the loss of loved ones, unemployment, declining health, divorce, and violent crimes. Job losses have left families struggling to pay for necessities like housing, food, and medical care. For many of us, this is a time of unprecedented struggle and turmoil. It has been unlike anything we have experienced. What do we do in the midst of troubles?

*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.
- John 14:1 NKJV*

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
- Philippians 4:6-7*

Casting all your care upon Him, for he cares for you. - 1 Peter 5:7

*I will lift up my eyes to the hills - From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. - Psalm 121:1-2*

As we continue to navigate these unprecedented times, be reminded that God is our Shepherd. He is watching over us, and His vision is perfect. Put our hope in Him for *The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him. Nahum 1:7*

Prayer: Father, Your word says that no weapon formed against us will prosper (Isaiah 54:17). I declare in the Name of Jesus that the enemy is driven from our homes, church families, workplaces, and children. God, I know that even when we experience the darkest seasons of difficulty and challenges, we can put our trust in You. I declare these truths in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mary Kahama, MFB East Africa supporter

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11

I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

- Psalm 27:13-14 NHEB

Most parents would agree that their children don't want to wait for anything. In our home, when my children would make a request, I would often reply, "Wait a minute" or "We'll have to wait and see." Their reaction of frustration was typical; however as my kids grew older, they learned the lesson that waiting was beneficial.

Even as adults, times of waiting can still be difficult. We can be distracted by the constant attempt from modern society to make our life easier and faster. With new technology giving us immediate answers and catering to our desires, we feel less willing to wait.

Such is our dilemma as Christians. We need to remember God works on His timetable. As we wait for God to answer our prayer or give us direction to do His will, we can trust He is working on our behalf. In my own life, during times of waiting, I find myself running ahead and trying to find ways to accomplish the outcome that I want to happen. My impatience often leads to frustration and added trouble. I have learned God gives us times of waiting to change us and grow our faith. Let us remain confident by faith that God will direct our lives and give us what we need in His perfect time.

This advent season, let us celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ with joyful hearts as we have experienced His love and know the goodness and timing of the Lord.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, I ask for patience in times of waiting. I'm thankful You are sovereign and know what is best for each of our lives. You deserve all praise for the goodness and love You freely give. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Gina Hodel, MFB Bloomington-Normal Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12

... and Elijah said, "Do not be afraid but go and do as you have said ... For thus says the Lord, the jar of flour will not fail nor the bottle of oil be diminished ..."

- I Kings 17:13-14 CPDV

By The Word, all creation became, and out of creation, mankind gets nourished. Elijah, the prophet and instrument of The Word, sought a little bread baked under ashes from the only flour and little oil remaining from the widows' jar and bottle. But by God's Word, the jar never diminished. It is from her selfless generosity she received unceasing nourishment.

The same Word in creation and perpetuated through the mouth of the prophets "became Flesh" (Jn 1: 14) and dwelt with us and experienced all our challenges in the fullness of humanity. He blessed the young boys' five loaves and two fish to feed 5000 men (Mk 6:30-44). Christ is not only concerned with our spiritual needs but also provides for our physical needs. It is not out of abundance that we help the less privileged in our midst but out of love to make them realize and feel the face of Christ with them. *For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. Truly I tell you whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did to me. (Mt 25:35-49).*

Prayer: Jesus, good master, we offer our service as a gift of love to the less privileged. May good work and our effort provide and nourish the poor and the hungry in the entire world. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leo Ndegwa Kihuihi, MFB East Africa Board Member

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



MONDAY, DECEMBER 13

If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. - Mark 9:23 KJV

There was one who grieved with a very heavy concern regarding his son that was troubled by the "evil one." When the disciples of Jesus were of no help, he approached Jesus personally about the situation and enquired of him, "if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." Jesus said unto him, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." And straightway, the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Jesus restored the man's son.

Often, we are faced with very real life situations that could involve ourselves, our family, our health, our livelihood; concerns that might be overwhelming. Human tendency is to first work it out on our own. When that doesn't work, we might reach out to others for help; like a loved one, friend or trustworthy source. Should all else fail, we resort to Jesus, hoping He will have mercy and compassion and help us in our time of need.

When we turn to Jesus, He invites us to have faith and believe on Him. Our degree of faith depicts how much we believe. This is when we may find that our real issue is not life situations but our unbelief. Putting Jesus as our hope, the object of our faith will help us gain the confidence to move forward in our uncharted course of life. Seeking him helps solve our "unbelief" in life's many situations. After all, He is the one who always knows the end from the very beginning.

Prayer: Lord, I often struggle with trusting and believing You and the promises in Your word. I know this because I strive to do things on my own. Please help me depend on You and Your word. Help me get more familiar with Your word and apply it to my life. In a time when there seems to be so much distraction, help me to see You more clearly and put You first. Help me to put skepticism, concern, loss of hope, and unbelief behind me. Just believing that You can help any situation gives me peace. I thank You and praise You for helping me believe. Amen.

Russ Pavkov, MFB Florida Advisory Board

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. - II Peter 1:2 ESV

Grace and peace are words that seem foreign in today's culture. This is partly due to the condition of our hearts. People think extending grace comes with a personal cost, and lasting peace is unattainable. No one understood this better than our Savior, Jesus Christ. That means He is both son of God and son of man. During His short life here, He experienced more suffering and hardship than any human being will ever face. He alone is the perfect model of supernatural peace amid temptation, torture, treachery, trials, and tribulation. Yet, He was at peace and full of grace in every situation this world had to offer.

Christ came to bring good tidings of great joy to all people, which was Salvation! (Luke 2:11), but it would cost him His life. We did not deserve His extravagant grace, but He gave it unconditionally to all who would receive it. His peace came from being one with God, the father of all things and maker of heaven and earth. In the fallen world we live in, we must look to Him for the same supernatural grace and peace as Jesus did.

True grace is offered to us freely at the foot of the cross and came with great sacrifice to the one who offered it. True peace comes from trusting God and abiding in Him through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Both grace (divine favor) and peace (inner tranquility) may be multiplied by accepting them for yourself through the gospel and passing them on. Can you imagine a world full of grace and peace? God has, and it starts with you! During this season, please consider accepting God's gift of grace and peace for yourself then re-gift it to those around you.

Prayer: Father God, the hymn states, "Oh, the peace we often forfeit, oh, the needless pain we bear all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." Our prayer is that humankind realize the grace offered, and resulting peace we have available, through the Gospel. Thank You for allowing us the opportunity to share both with the world around us. Amen.

John Whitaker, MFB Indiana Employee

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15

From Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, wrapped in the love of God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. - Jude 1:1 NET

Giving a gift at Christmas can be a heart-felt chore. First, I think, and I think, and I think about the loved ones on my list. What does each person need or want? What dreams do they dream? How can I best show my love for each one? After much deliberation, I choose the best gift for each person, then commence the wrapping.

Whether using a special card with cheery words or a decorated bag with colorful tissue or paper with ribbons and bows, wrapping a Christmas present adds a personal element to the main attraction. This final act is to show my love is wrapped in the best I have to give. The gift is covered, beribboned, bowed, labeled and placed under the Christmas tree branches in anticipation of the big day.

That is what God did for us over two thousand years ago in the town of Bethlehem. Because He knows our needs, wants, and dreams, our good Father chose the best gift of all, Jesus, for each of us to receive salvation. He covered the babe in human likeness and lovingly placed Him underneath the branches of heaven. On the Christmas morning of our acceptance of His gift, we wrap God's love around our hearts with the certainty of hope while ribbons of joy encircle our lives and bows of peace decorate our days.

During this season of Advent, ponder this precious gift of salvation. How does your daily walk reflect the hope, love, joy, and peace that came to earth that night so long ago?

Prayer: Thank You for the best gift of all, Jesus. May each day renew the faith of our salvation as we wrap God's love around our lives. May others see the light of our Savior as we walk in the peace, hope, and joy that only come from You. Amen.

Suzanne Quattlebaum, MFB Friend

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart. - 1 Peter 1:22 ESV

Often we underestimate the importance and power of the truth. According to the apostle Peter, we should settle for nothing less.

Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Being set free implies that without the truth, we are slaves to something, like the lies and deception of the enemy and the ways of a lost world. When we truly know Jesus, He will set us free from the bondages of this world. They are empty and meaningless, especially when compared to the abundant life of living with a pure heart that God offers us, through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

To understand that we 'purify our souls by our obedience to the truth' is to understand the power that God gives us through The Holy Spirit who lives in all those who call Jesus "Lord and Savior." When we are obedient to the truth, we not only add integrity to our lives, but we also honor God by being good witnesses for Christ. If we realize how important the truth is to God and the impact it has on our world, we should desire and practice it daily as we love one another, to the glory of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as we celebrate the birth of Your Son this season, help us not to settle for anything less than Your truth, so we can share it and Your love with a world that desperately needs it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Mark Rosenfeld, Richwoods Christian Church, MFB Peoria Share Partner

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. - Luke 2:25-32 KJV

Simeon had a promise that he would not die before seeing "the Lord's Christ." He had the hope of a promise yet to be fulfilled.

Do you think Simeon was discouraged as time passed and the promise had not come? Did he question the Lord? One indication of Simeon's heart is the phrase "he came by the Spirit into the temple." From this, we know that Simeon listened to the Spirit. We can surmise that he was faithfully serving the Lord while he waited.

What promises do we have from God if we seek and love Him? He will forgive us when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9). He will direct our paths (Proverbs 3:6). All things work together for good (Romans 8:28). He will give us wisdom when we ask (James 1:5). These are just a few of the many promises we can read in the Bible.

But what of my lost child? What of that problematic relationship I'm struggling with? How will I find work? What of the health issue pressing on me? We also know from the Bible that God has His own appointed times and that He does not fail.

Can we wait, like Simeon, for the "consolation of Israel?" Can we believe that He will never forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6)? Can we continue to serve Him while we wait for His promises to be fulfilled?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the wisdom and faith to trust Your timing. I lay all of my cares, one by one, into Your hands. Thank You for loving and leading me. Amen.

Phil Hodel, MFB Employee

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18

Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out ... I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and ... I will feed my flock and I will lead them to rest ... Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them ... and be their shepherd.
- Ezekiel 34:11-23 ESV

This Advent season is a time for God's people to prepare for the upcoming celebration of Jesus Christ's birth and wait in expectation of His return at the second coming. About 700 years before He was born, the prophet foretold Jesus' birth, "*Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son ...*" Is. 7:14. God promised Moses, 1500 years before Jesus was born, He would redeem His people with an "outstretched arm" and with "great judgments." Ex. 6:6. And now, further out into our future, through the prophet Ezekiel, God tells us again what to expect just before Jesus' second coming.

We can find great comfort this Advent knowing that God, Himself, will search for, seek, and gather us together into a place He has prepared for us. Jesus told us He was going to His Father's house "to prepare a place" for us and "*if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you also will be.*" John 14:2-3.

Prayer: *Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, that is, Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.* - Hebrews 13:20-21

Tom Keith, MFB Florida Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

- Luke 1:76-79 NIV

The readings for the fourth week of Advent explore Jesus' identity, His work among us, and His second coming - all of which are rooted in God's love for the world. Jesus came as a champion for and first fruits of the Kingdom of God, bringing life, light, and love, which all work together to bring peace and fulfillment (also known as Shalom, in our lives.)

Jesus' ministry on earth brought peace. The ripples of His ministry have grown into waves that have touched every corner of the world. Now we long for the fulfillment of His work in His second coming. He is called the Prince of Peace, and His desire is for us to know Him personally and experience His peace in our lives.

On this side of heaven, there is a tension between living in the now-but-not-yet of the Kingdom of God. During this Advent season and into Christmas, why not slow down, sit back and reflect on how God wants you to experience His peace and how you can be an agent of that peace to your family, neighborhood, and workplace?

Prayer: Almighty God, You came into the world in a lowly manger and changed everything forever. Your healing touch and unfailing love brought sight to the blind, strength to the lame, and freedom to the oppressed. Now we wait expectantly for the day when there will be no more death, no more mourning, no more crying or pain; the day when You make all things new. So we pray, come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

Brent Carl, MFB New England Employee

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



MONDAY, DECEMBER 20

Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you. - Psalm 55:22 ESV

A Christmas song I love is "O Holy Night." It describes Jesus' birth as bringing "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices." That is as applicable today as it was in Jesus' time. Jesus was born into a weary world in desperate times. The census was being conducted to raise already high taxes; the Romans were in power, and murderous Herod was king. Things didn't get better immediately or easily, and some things even got worse. Our world is "weary" now, too, from the pandemic, divisiveness, and many other things.

But good news was announced by an angel who told the shepherds, "Fear not." Why? They said, "a Savior has been born." There are two great truths here that are very relevant always, and especially now.

First, we don't have to be afraid. The command to "Fear not" is the most frequent in the Bible. It acknowledges what the world is like (weary), and what we are like (needy). There are real reasons to be afraid, but the Bible repeatedly commands us not to.

Second, a Savior has been born. He was born into this world to save us from our sins, so we could have peace with God and experience the peace of God. He is "Emmanuel," God with us, and He promises never to leave us or forsake us and to provide all our needs.

That is good news. In our weary world, we can rejoice and experience the thrill of hope (a confident expectation of a future blessing) that will sustain us.

Prayer: We worship and praise you, Lord, and thank You for coming into our weary world. We rejoice in the hope we have through Jesus and are thankful that we don't have to be afraid no matter what is happening in the world. Amen.

Carol Joseph, MFB Indiana Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21

No doubt, the past 20 months have been challenging for us all. Yet, when we experience personal difficulties and God doesn't "fix it," our humanity wants to scream, "WHY?!"

Jesus says "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace. In the world you have tribulation and distress and suffering, but be courageous [be confident, be undaunted, be filled with joy]; I have overcome the world." [My conquest is accomplished, my victory abiding.] - John 16:33 AMP

The Covid-9 pandemic hit our family hard this fall. We lost a member. My cousin was an active, funny, loving, service-oriented, 52-year-young husband, father, and grandfather. He became ill, with his entire family all getting sick in various severity. He began to struggle. We immediately began praying for divine intervention and healing. When it seems God doesn't answer or isn't fixing what's wrong, what do you do? How do you respond, to news of your loved one's life ending against every prayer offered, literally around the clock?

Jesus says we will experience tribulation and suffering. When it hits home, we can respond by pressing into Him harder, or we can flee in anger. That is one extreme to the other. Most times, we vacillate somewhere in-between. I did. When my cousin's health began to seriously decline, along with the family, I prayed without ceasing (1 Thessalonian 5:17). But God had other plans, plans that glorified Himself when he reached down and took my cousin by the hand and escorted him into eternity. Wow! Was I happy? Honestly, not at first. I had joy for my cousin. However, joy is not dependent upon our circumstances. God wasn't fixing my cousin, or was He?

Prayer: Thank you, Lord God, for the great compassion You show us and the people You have used to bring us hope. Help us to serve others with that same love. Open our eyes to those around us who have lost hope. Work in us and through us to bring the hope they so desperately need. May all of the glory and thanks be to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LoriAnn Sadler, Hands and Feet Ministry, MFB Pennsylvania nonprofit partner

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 22

Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. - Psalm 36:5 NASB

The chilly evening air blew against my face. I could feel the cold in my chest as I watched my misty breath drift into the calm surroundings. The smell of a nearby campfire brought familiar boyhood feelings, laughing with friends, and hiding in piles of crisp autumn leaves. Above me, the black expanse gave center stage to the starry universe and its message - "night to night reveals knowledge." The knowledge of our Holy Creator which has touched my heart deeply is this - "Your faithfulness reaches to the skies" (Psalm 36:5). Oh, what comfort! His faithfulness cannot be measured. He could not possibly be more faithful. His faithfulness is our guarantee that He will fulfill and accomplish all He has promised! "His faithfulness is a shield and wall." The "shield" of His faithfulness provides a beautiful, personal image of protection.

Sometimes life is challenging, and there are times when we struggle. Have you been worried about something? Do you feel disheartened or lonely? Have comfort and peace felt scarce? Have fiery darts of doubt or confusion been threatening your hope? At these times, remember - Jesus does not say, "Stop it, try harder." Instead, He says, "Come." May I offer the simple encouragement that we come to Jesus with the burdens on our hearts? Jesus knows us, and He said, "In the world, you have tribulation." He went on to say, "but take courage; I have overcome the world." Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, "the bright morning star," is not distant or aloof. He KNOWS you. He knows the number of hairs on your head, He sympathizes with our human weaknesses, and He cares deeply about all your concerns. Cast your cares upon Him, and He will make your care His chief concern and help in time of need!

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for the gift of forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and a personal relationship with You through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I praise You, knowing Christ is at Your right hand, interceding for me. Thank You for Your commitment to me. Your love and promise to help me give me great hope amidst the problems in this world. You are in control! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Philip Schmidt, MFB Morton Board Member

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23

*For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.
- Luke 1:49 KJV*

Adam and Eve were flawless people who lived in a flawless world who had a flawless relationship with God, their creator, and with each other. When we look at them, we see what we were created to be and what God had in mind for each of us. God asked only one thing of them, not to eat the fruit from one tree. Their choice to disobey must not have seemed like much in the moment - just a bite from a piece of fruit; however, that choice had serious consequences. They were separated from God, from each other relationally, and from nature's proper functioning. Imagine their anguish. They knew life in a perfect world as no one has known it since. They knew exactly what they lost, whereas we can only imagine what it had been like.

God did not leave them without hope. As soon as they sinned, He promised that at some future time, a Redeemer would rise up and crush the evil, even though the embodiment of evil would first strike the Redeemer's heel. Thousands of years passed after the promise was given. Men and women struggled with alienation from God, each other, and the physical world around them.

Then in the tiny, fifth-rate village of Bethlehem, in a third-rate land under subjugation to the leading world power, the birth of a baby boy changed the course of history. The promise of redemption to Adam and Eve was fulfilled. The Promised One broke the curse of death, freed us from the alienation, restoring to each of us a personal relationship with God. We think of God's great gift at Christmas, a gift that is practical enough for daily use, priceless in value, and timeless in duration.

Prayer: Dear Father, remind me of the value of the Gift and the price that was paid. And let me use it wisely, for wisdom unto salvation and peace. Amen.

Mike Meece, MFB Bloomington-Normal Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. - Isaiah 9:6 NIV

We are so very grateful to our Heavenly Father God for loving us so much that He has given us His Son, Jesus, the most precious gift anyone could ever receive!

We live in a world that is filled with darkness, with trials and tribulations that come into our lives from forces seen and unseen. Let us not be discouraged during these dark times. We have Jesus - the One above all things who reigns as our "Mighty God, Everlasting Father." Jesus is our hope and the light shining so brightly in this earthly world.

God created us in His Image. Let us be like Jesus, filled with love, peace, joy, and hope in all seasons of our lives. *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven."* Matthew 5:16

Let us share what we have with others. Let us be bold in sharing our faith and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others with love and encouragement.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, God, we come to You with our heart full of love and gratitude for giving us Your Son, Jesus. Dear Holy Spirit, guide us as we continue in our walk with God and in our journey with Jesus. Let us be more like Jesus. Help us spread His love, peace, and joy to all with a kind and humbled heart. Let us encourage one another, always giving You the glory and honor. In the precious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Erin Joy Graziani, MFB New England Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

