

MIDWEST FOOD BANK 2020 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

As with all of you, 2020 has been a dynamic year for Midwest Food Bank. As the pandemic measures took place, our partner nonprofit agencies saw a 20-50% increase in the need for food. At the same time, COVID-19 related protocols limited the number of volunteers MFB could accommodate.

Despite these and other obstacles, MFB was able to remain open and provide food for our partners. This would not have been possible without the solid support of our donors and volunteers. Generous donors stepped up and provided funds to support our food procurement. Dedicated volunteers put in extra time to make up for the shortfall in people. Prayer warriors covered our operations in prayer. These, combined with the blessings of God, have allowed the Midwest Food Bank mission* to be fulfilled.

As a way of saying "Thank you," we have developed an Advent Devotional to encourage our partners in the fight against food insecurity. We have included many distinct voices of MFB's nonprofit partners, board members, and employees. These aren't edited to be uniform - each 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.

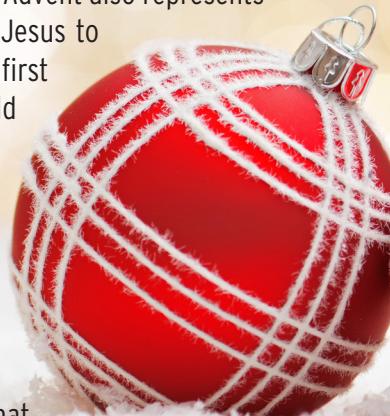
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. There will be a time that will be filled with glory. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Excerpts from Isaiah 9 NLT)

I love to get ready for a party! Hospitality is one of my spiritual gifts. I enjoy thoughtfully preparing details that make my guests feel special! It's probably one of the things I've missed the most in 2020. This past year has been a season of darkness and despair and I've grieved over not getting to spend time with people I love. We have lost many things that we used to take for granted, including going to the store without wearing a mask!

Advent celebrates and anticipates Christ's first coming. Advent also represents the "last days" as God's people wait for the return of Jesus to accomplish His eternal kingdom. When the Israelites first heard the prophesies of a coming Messiah, they could remember their days as lonely slaves in exile.

Darkness and despair will not go on forever! We have hope because God loves us so much that He has rescued us from this world. Let's get ready and celebrate the hope we have because of Jesus!



Prayer: Father, thank you for loving us so much that you orchestrated a plan to rescue us through entering your creation through your Son, Jesus. Forgive us for when we focus on the darkness and despair of this world instead of the hope we have in our Savior. Help us to rejoice in this season and focus on the birth of our Redeemer! We pray that when others see us, they see the light of Jesus shining through us!

In Jesus name we pray, Amen!

Nicki Green, MFB Bloomington-Normal Board Member

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30

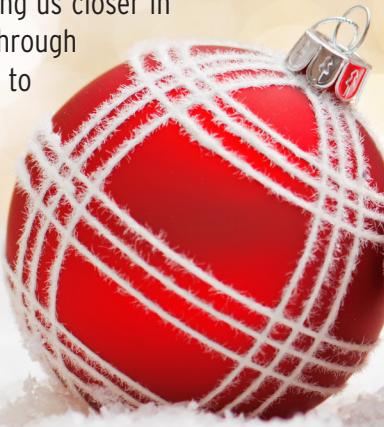
We have certainly had our share of struggles this year: COVID-19 Pandemic, Social Justice Movement, joblessness, loss of loved ones, and loss of plain old normalcy. If we haven't personally been impacted, we know of others who have. How do children of God respond when the world seems to be getting darker? God wants us to shine like stars in the universe.

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe."

- Philippians 2:14-15

Let's be aware that our light should be shining brighter for the unbelievers to see God in us. Let's fight fear with faith, by trusting that God already knows what we need, then expect God to act. Let's not worry or complain. Instead, we'll pray and ask God for wisdom, protection, and favor. Did you know that struggles are designed to 1) teach 2) make us stronger and 3) bring us closer in relationship with God? Bask in the learning gained through the experience of the struggle, and use your testimony to encourage others. God is always with you! God is able!

What struggles are you facing? How do you stay focused on the fact that God is sovereign and in complete control? Is your response a reflection of Christ in your life? Remember others are watching you, even when you least expect. A lamp is not placed on the floor but held high to give light to everyone in the house. Let your lights shine!



Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I know that the real battle is not with each other, but with the evil forces of this world. Please help me to put others first, be willing to listen, and be curious. I pray that Your peace and presence are in control of my life. I pray for those who mistreat me and others around me, and I pray that I respond in love, so that others may see Your good works through me. I pray that my trials bring me closer to You and help me to stay focused on You when I don't know what to do. Amen.

Deidre Smith, MFB Arizona Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

- Philippians 2:3

The apostle Paul identifies the way of life for the Christ-follower in this passage from Philippians 2. We are not to be only concerned with our own needs but also about the needs of others. In fact, by helping others we demonstrate that we are true followers of Jesus. What did Jesus do? He empathized with others, considered and addressed their needs as more important than His own, and all without calling any attention to Himself. He epitomized humility.

Some of the senior saints from our church have had the opportunity to pack and package food that was headed out of state. They worked diligently and joyfully knowing that God had given them the chance to meet the needs of others and to spread His love. Whether packing and boxing food, hauling food from a warehouse to the cities where it's needed or meeting emergency needs when a virus, hurricane, tornado, or flood hits, every volunteer has the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Father, Please help us make meeting the needs of others our priority. We pray that the honor and glory will go to You. Please continue to provide food and volunteers to serve and distribute it.

Thank You. Amen.

Jeff Mayfield, MFB Bloomington-Normal Nonprofit Partner

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2

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

The Lord God, Creator of the universe, had a plan from the very beginning. This passage was written about 700 years before Jesus was born. God had chosen the way of the Savior born into this earth to rescue all of mankind. As we remember this truth and celebrate, we are able to rest in the fact that our God even has a plan for each of our lives. This beautiful truth is the inspiration for the Christmas song, "Hope of the World." It starts with remembering Mary, the young girl who was living a quiet life before the moment the Lord revealed how He would use her in His plan.

"I suppose He already knew
All He had in store for you
A long time coming, now suddenly here
Forever has never been quite this near"

Jesus is the reason we celebrate! Two thousand years ago, God allowed a young innocent girl to carry the Savior of the world. And guess what! He is calling each of us to carry the same Savior in our hearts and display Him to all those around us in love.

"He gave us heaven on earth and a story to tell
God here with us, our Emmanuel
All the young and the old ones, the boys and the girls
God's children you carry the hope of the world
My love, you carry the hope of the world."

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that You keep Your promises. Thank You for the privilege to carry Your love to those around me. Lord, make me faithful as You are faithful. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hannah Mwangi, MFB Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3

And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.

- Mark 9:35

Early in life, human nature tends to rear its ugly head and claim the “me first” attitude. A selfish attitude is one that many of us struggle with for an entire lifetime. It just seems natural to push to the forefront in order to get where we want to go and/or get what we want. Yet real JOY comes when we put “Jesus first, Others second and Yourself last”. Jesus knew the heart of each of his disciples and he knows our hearts too. How well we know our own heart can make all the difference in the relationship we have with our Heavenly Father as well as with others around us; especially during the difficult times in which we live.

Jesus teaches us that acknowledging Him first while serving others will bring us the greatest blessings of life; something He considers great in His kingdom.

Prayer: Father, forgive my selfishness and help me to guard my heart. I want to be more loving and serving. Give me added grace to put You first in my life while preferring others before me. May the world today be a better place because of me. Thank You for Your faithfulness to me.

Russ Pavkov, MFB Florida Board Member



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4

My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; He is mine forever.

- Psalm 73:26

In the unpredictability of life, we have a constant, on Whom we can rely.

In the midst of all the change, distress, and chaos, our hearts can know strength.

He is your Provider and your Protector, and He will be the strength of your heart.

He is your Comforter and Counsellor, and He is yours forever.

Prayer: Lord, thank You that no matter what I go through, You are right there with me. In the difficulties, and in my internal struggles, hope is always there, because You are there with me. Regardless of what I go through, You remain my Source of strength and hope. Thank You In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

Pastor Masha, MFB East Africa Volunteer



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

- Colossians 3:12

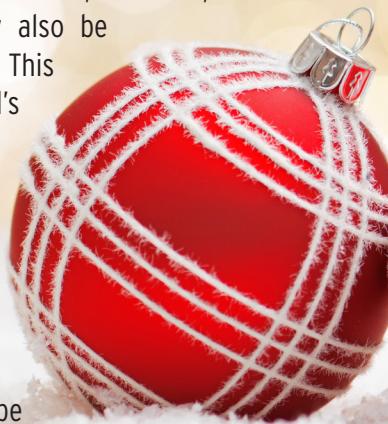
No one is born with clothes. "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart (Job 1:21).*"

A newborn baby is very soon wrapped with some form of clothing not just for their benefit but also of those around them. Clothing is a basic necessity. Dressing for the day never occurs automatically, it is a conscious and deliberate effort which may be influenced by culture, custom, and environment. Clothing must be worn every single day.

No one is naturally born with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. These attributes do not come to us automatically once we became Christians. They have to be deliberately selected, cultivated, nurtured, and maintained. As with clothing, these attributes may also be accentuated by our culture, custom, and environment. This type of clothing is encouraged particularly for God's chosen people, who are holy and dearly loved. The picture I have in mind is like God has specifically picked out the outfits for the day and each attribute is an item of clothing. Each of the attributes is laid out overnight for us to choose to wear for the day when we wake up. Of course, you can choose not to wear any of the items, but the good Lord seems to always lay these pieces out for us to choose. Today, as you dress for the day, I hope you choose to wear the five items carefully selected for you. Look in the mirror and smile. That outfit looks great on you! Now face the day.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help me remember to clothe myself daily with your compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.
In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Elizabeth Mutsoli, MFB East Africa Board Member



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

- Luke 2:20

Shepherds are among my favorite characters in the Christmas story. They are the ones that I can identify with the most, common people going about their daily duties but called to participate in the greatest gift of all, the birth of Jesus. I like to imagine that I too could be used as a Christmas shepherd, spreading the good news of Jesus while bringing glory and honor to God as I go about my work.

Shepherds use three main items from their professional tool bag: rod, staff, and voice. Envision using these shepherds' tools in the daily work of loving others.

The rod, God's word, is used as support and protection from the troubles encountered in this world each day. Have I prepared for my work today by reading my Bible and engraving the words upon my heart?

That simple shepherd's staff or crook is the smile of support, the touch of the hand of acceptance, the arm of love reaching out to bring comfort to a hurting world. Am I diligently seeking the lost and using a gentle hook to draw others into the family of God?

The third tool is the shepherd's voice, the call to a personal relationship with the Master Shepherd, the One who guides us all. Is my voice heard in this worldly wilderness as a quiet whisper of life, a gentle reminder to all, you are loved? Or is it a bold exaltation glorifying and praising God for all the wonderful things He has done, giving life through His greatest gift, Jesus Christ our King?

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the gift of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who modeled for us how to love others. We thank you for including us in Your story not just at Christmas but the whole year through. Embolden us to use the tools of the shepherd each day as we live our lives for Christ on this wilderness road of life. Amen

Suzanne Quattlebaum, MFB Georgia Friend



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7

They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

- Matthew 20:33-34

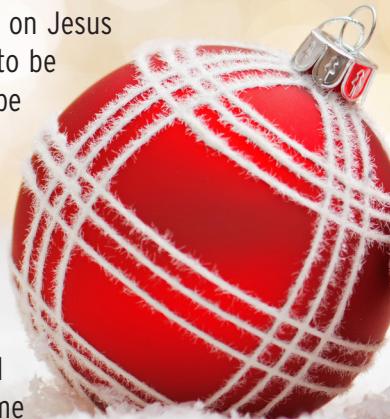
Many seasons of life don't make sense. Our eyes can be blinded by hurt and obstacles in front of us. Why am I an only child? Why am I a single parent? Why are my kids bullied for being good people? Why do I have this boss? Why did my friend betray me? Why ... ?

When we settle on the question "Why?," our trust level is low. We can feel alone and separated. We can struggle with feeling God has singled us out for pain. When we get stuck on "Why?," it's time to change our focus. Jesus was sent to the world so our eyes could have a different focal point. What we see in each season of life is a choice. We can see the season or the whole of life.

Whatever "Why?" is in front of us, let's focus our eyes on Jesus and not settle on the question. Ask for blurred vision to be made clear. Jesus can touch our eyes and our sight can be restored. We may or may not get our answer, but we can see his purpose and the miracle of healing. He hasn't run out of miracles. Renewed vision can give us peace and joy through the questions of life.

Prayer: Lord, I pray that You open my eyes to see what You see. Touch my eyes so that my vision is not blurred by the "Why?," and I can refocus on Your eyes. Point me in the direction You want me to look so your perfect peace consumes my heart. Amen

Dana Williamsen, MFB Employee



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. -John 14:26 KJV

2020 has been a different year. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us. At Midwest Food Bank we've had to alter our group volunteer protocols. Instead of a banquet, we had a drive-through event. In the midst of all of this, we've seen the work of the Holy Spirit.

The drive-through event turned out to be a unique blessing. Volunteers have stepped up and enable MFB to have its largest distribution year ever. The Tender Mercies packaging machine was able to step in and fill the void made by the halting of hand-packaging groups.

This evidence of God's work has been present since the opening of MFB. He is at work inside MFB, making it so much more than a place that feeds the hungry. We see God in the people who serve at MFB. He is in the children who can't get enough of serving others. He is in the families who together make up for the volunteer who can't be here now. He's at work when a volunteer suffers a loss and is surrounded by support and love through tough times.

Then, there are the "God stories." It could be just the right amount of money being donated to buy that forklift we need or pay off a debt. Maybe it's a check that pays for a big order of Tender Mercies. Or the recently retired man who wants to be a truck driver during the farm season when drivers are hard to come by.



It's been amazing to see God working in the hearts of men and women doing miracles. It's a way God gives us the comfort of the Holy Spirit to remind us that He is close by. I was reminded by a friend recently, that God is behind us, in front of us, beside us, and in us, so complete.

Prayer: Father, Thank You for the people we see at work in Your Kingdom. Lead us by Your Holy Spirit to show Your love. Give us the grace to share with others the wonderful things we see you doing. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Billy Daniel, MFB Morton Board Member

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. - Romans 12:1-2

The call to offer your body as a sacrifice is all about surrendering control and yielding to the transforming power of Jesus. This text is speaking about our physical bodies, but it's more than that. Paul is speaking of our entire being – our whole self. It's also about the Body of Christ in total surrender to Jesus. When we allow Him to renew our minds, His perfect and pleasing will is made clear.

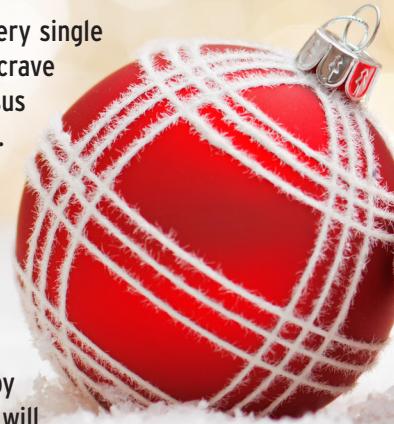
There is pressure to conform to the ways of the world every single day. And when we do, we never find peace. The peace we all crave is only found by separating all of our thoughts. Give to Jesus all of the calls to conform to negativity and condemnation. Dwell on what is good, pure, and righteous – Jesus himself. Dwelling on His goodness is where and when you will find His perfect will for your life.

**This prayer is a paraphrase of Romans 12:1-2
made personal:**

Jesus, in light of your mercy to me, I want to worship you by surrendering my flesh. I want to know and experience your will for my life. I know Your way is better than anything I could dream. I'm tired of the results of conforming to this world (name them) and even though I'm fearful and tired, I trust you. Transform me! Amen.

Ann Kafer, MFB National Board Member

Midwest Food Bank *Advent Devotional*



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10

There is much anticipation when opening up a gift. On the outside, it is likely wrapped with dazzling paper and accessorized with glitter and bows. But what really matters is the contents inside this beautiful paper. It could be a joyously awaited item or it could be stale bread and old banana peels. It's unlikely you will be receiving the latter gift but this imagery makes us stop and think about the inside contents, instead of the outside. What about the inner contents of you? What's in your heart? Not the blood and arteries of your physical heart, but what makes up your emotional and spiritual heart?

In Colossians 3, you can read about some beautiful and pretty ugly things that can be tucked away in your heart, from anger, wrath, bitterness, and malice (verse 8) to compassion, kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness (verses 12 and 13). When you let Jesus take over your heart, it is much more likely to be filled with beautiful things like love, kindness, joy, and forgiveness. When our heart is filled with these traits from God, the inside contents are reflected on the outside of our life. This is more beautiful than dazzling paper with glitter and bows.

This holiday season, take some time to dig into the corners of your heart and see what makes up the innermost part of you and brings forth life. Will you make room in your heart this holiday season for Jesus and the beautiful gifts of love, joy, and peace that He offers?

And let the peace of God rule in your heart...and be thankful. - Colossians 3:15

Prayer: Father God and Lord Jesus, As I go about this season, help me be aware of what fills my heart. Help me make room for You to live in me. Let Your presence dwell in me and Your love, joy, compassion, and peace flow out in my actions. May I bring honor and glory to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lisa Martin, MFB Employee



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.

- Isaiah 9:2 NLT

Advent is a season of looking back so we can look ahead. Setting our sights on what is to come because of who has already come; Jesus. The church looks back upon Christ's coming in celebration while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation. His past faithfulness breathes confidence into future possibilities. Advent matters because it's our way of keeping our eyes, hearts, and arms wide open to what God wants to do in the earth.

I remember my first son being born. My first reaction was not, "Will he ever learn math?" "Will he love the Dallas Cowboys as all righteous people do?" It wasn't any question of worry or concern. It was and is, "What is possible for him?"

Babies are hope personified. Pure potential. Regardless of all future challenges or difficulties. What is possible? Every time we remember his birth we remember that question. What is possible? Joy unspeakable. Peace unceasing. Love unconditional.

Paying attention to everything around us, maybe we don't see it. But here's the thing about Advent: we celebrate precisely because we are paying attention. We have our hearts open to what is to come. The promise for the church is Jesus Christ; he has come, and he will come again. This is the essence of Advent.

I believe it still: God is redeeming all that is broken in us and curing all that is sick in us and bringing all that is dead in us to life.

It has happened. It is happening. It is possible.

Prayer: Jesus, remind me of your faithfulness in this season. No matter what this year has been for me and others, help us to see hope. To see the possibilities and potential that Jesus' birth brings.

Brandon Cole, MFB Texas Church Partner



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12

Amen, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.

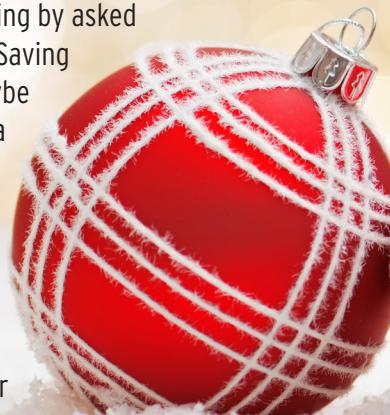
- Matthew 25:40

2020 is different than any time in our lives. Our emotions have run the gamut from fear to courage, from excitement to disappointment, and from hopeful to hopeless. Coronavirus, social distancing, hand-washing, wearing masks, and PPE are now commonplace. We are learning new words and new ways to live.

Many have suffered the loss of loved ones. As of this writing, over 37 million have contracted the virus, and over 1 million have died. Our world has lost over a million of God's precious children. Each one of us has been touched in some way or knows someone who has lost a job, home, business, grandparent, mother, father, or child. This virus has made the hungriest of our world hungrier, the poorest poorer. We know people don't want to ask for help but desperately need it.

I love the story of a young boy walking along a seashore, throwing starfish stranded on shore back into the ocean. An old man passing by asked what he was doing. "I'm saving these starfish," he said. "Saving them?" the old man said. "There are thousands, maybe millions of them. What you're doing can't possibly make a difference." The young boy picked up another starfish and said, "It's going to make a difference to this one."

With each act of kindness and charitable act, pray that it will make a difference in the life of the recipient. We may not see a smile in return, a look of relief, tears of joy, or despair subside. Keep making a difference. Mother Teresa said if you can't feed all the hungry, just feed one. Let's do what's in our power and leave the rest to our Lord.



Prayer: Good and gracious God, It is difficult to see people hungry and suffering, especially children. We ask You to give the hungry their daily bread today and end their hunger. Continue to open our hearts to those in need so we might do Your will. Lord Jesus, You who heal the sick, heal those who have been affected in our world by the coronavirus in any way. Help us to trust in Your most merciful care. We ask all these blessings in Jesus' name. Amen.

Bill Hampton, MFB Georgia Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13

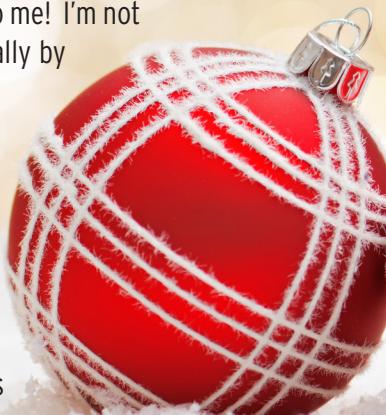
Peter said "Silver or gold, I do not have. But, what I have, I give to you. - Acts 3:6

Have you ever wondered how God could use you and your resources? I have ... many times! And when I stay in a place of humble obedience, I discover my life is richer because of what God does through me. It seems during this season, hearts are more tender towards serving others. But, what if we kept our hearts tender all year? What if we spend time in prayer this Christmas and ask God, "Lord, what do I have that can be used by You?"

Pastors share that "some go, some stay to pray, and some pay, yet ALL impact the kingdom of God." In our tendency to overthink, we can miss our "simple assignment" because we downplay what we have or fear holds us back.

Recently, I learned this firsthand. A dear friend asked me to deliver a Bible to a childhood female friend. A strong nudge prompted him to do this. She lived in a small town about 20 miles away and all he asked was that I deliver the bible and share my faith with her. Sounds easy enough? Well, not to me! I'm not comfortable sharing Jesus with total strangers - especially by knocking on their door.

But, I knew I was being asked to "go," my friend was following his nudge to "pay" for the Bible, and I surrounded myself with those who would "pray" as I stepped out on this assignment. God orchestrated something beautiful that fully demonstrated His love! I met a woman battling lung cancer who was recently diagnosed with colon cancer. She needed to feel God's love for her and His desire for her to be with Him in Heaven someday. He used ALL of us to share what we had to give.



Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray this holiday season, we all discover how You can use what little we give to be used by You in mighty ways. May we all draw nearer to You as we witness our little being turned into much by Your mighty hand. Amen

Lori Allen, MFB Peoria Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose - Romans 8:28

2020 is a year we will all remember. Each of us will have stories to tell about this year for generations to come. My husband and I were struck by the images of long car lines in food banks, landfills of vegetables that had to be thrown out and wasted milk. It was enough to drive us to our knees to seek God in prayer. We believe in God's word. ALL things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Not SOME things. But ALL things. Many times in 2020, we all must be reminded of this truth. What challenges are you facing this year? What is God calling you to in 2020?

Our time in prayer directed us to pursue opening the Pennsylvania Division of Midwest Food Bank. This is incredibly exciting! It is also incredibly hard. We had a burning desire to expand our feeding efforts to those in need in Pennsylvania where the pandemic also ravished families' health, businesses and jobs. We know that God put this desire in our heart. Yet, the growth has come with the expected growing pains. Any start-up operation is a challenge, let alone in the midst of a pandemic. We had dark nights where we wrestled with faith and doubt. All along, we knew we were not alone in facing trials. When God's children remain faithful to following His calling, ALL things will work together for good. Through our challenges, God has been on the throne and His faithfulness in full display!



Through this faith journey, God has brought us new friends, and amazing team, a building for the MFB operations and volunteers blessing us and each other with their presence. Only God can turn a test into a testimony.

Prayer: Dear Father God, you know ALL things. Lead us to use our two fish and five loaves of bread to feed Your 5,000. We put our faith in you as we continue to walk 2020 out and beyond. We don't have to have all the answers and we don't have to understand your ways. We only have to know that You are God who make ALL things work together for good to those who love you. We love you. Amen

Aleta Serrano, MFB Pennsylvania Board President

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. - John 10:10b

Abundant life, what do you think of when you hear those words? Does it bring up images of material wealth and prestige? If this were true then Jesus would have been the richest person alive and yet He was quite the opposite. When Jesus tells us He came to give abundant life it wasn't just a promise to come but rather a promise for today right where you are. Some may wonder "how do you get abundant life when life feels hard?" The clues are in some of the other things Jesus had to say. Jesus defined eternal/abundant life when He said, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3). It all comes down to knowing God the Father and His Son, Jesus. It is not just about life lasting forever.

While we as believers already have salvation, we must grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). As our spiritual understanding matures our relationship with God and subsequently others, deepens. We are transformed and experience peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7). This peace comes regardless of life circumstances. An abundant life is a Spirit-filled life that consists of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). To have more of this is truly abundance.

Even though we may desire material things, as believers, our life has been forever changed. We are a new creation so our understanding of abundance has also been transformed. This Christmas season, let us embrace the abundant life by spending time with our Lord and Savior, seeking a deeper understanding of the One who gives the abundant life. "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:2).



Prayer: Lord Jesus, Thank You for coming to earth that I may have abundant life. Give me wisdom to understand what this means. Help me love and follow You closely, that Your life might shine through me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Kim Morris, MFB Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. - Acts 2:29-31

The Advent, the coming of Christ, is the day the world received God's promised gift. What about that gift? What does it mean for us today? This Advent, go beyond the manger. Too many of us are stuck on the infant. It's time we moved on to the man at Christmastime. Christmas is not about a baby, it's about the coming of the Savior of the world - 2000 years ago to a manger, but 33 years later, to the hearts of man. That's what the Advent is today, the coming of Jesus to live in man's heart. Jesus is no longer looking for a room at the Inn, but room in your heart. Unfortunately, the world continues to tell Jesus they have no room for Him.

In today's scripture, Peter was explaining that David had been buried and had not come back to life. Not only had Jesus been raised from the dead, He is now at the right hand of God. David had not ascended to the heavens, But the apostles witnessed the ascension of Jesus. Peter's conclusion is clear: Jesus, the One crucified, is both Lord and Christ.

Prayer: Lord, We thank You for coming to earth to save us. Thank You for Your death on the cross and for rising from death to life. Thank You for sitting at the right hand of God, making intercession for us. We worship You as our Lord and Savior. Amen

Pastor Greg Byrd, MFB Texas Board Member



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." - Matthew 2:1-2, NIV

Advent is a time filled with wonder and anticipation as Christ-followers around the world prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. These Magi from the east, in the Biblical story, demonstrate for us in a most striking fashion, what it means to fully enter into the fullness of this season, in three tangible ways.

First, they model for us what it means to be watching for Jesus. It was seeing his star that prompted them to seek Jesus out, but they wouldn't have seen the star if they weren't watching for it in advance.

Second, when they saw the star, they asked about it. They let wonder and curiosity lead them as they saw this glimpse of Jesus' arrival.

Third, they allowed what they saw and heard to then move them towards worship. They didn't just take in the knowledge of Jesus's birth and do nothing with it. They allowed the news to move them towards action - a long journey that would eventually bring them to Jesus himself so they could shower him with gifts and worship him.

When I read these words, I can't help but wonder, do we who follow Jesus today, enter into the advent season with the same longing, curiosity, wonder, movement to action, and worship as the Magi so long ago? If not, why?

2020 has been a difficult year for everyone, but one thing is the same. Jesus came as a baby more than 2,000 years ago. He lived, he died, and he IS currently on his throne awaiting his return. With this knowledge in mind, may we all enter into this advent season to worship Jesus who was, and is, and is to come.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for coming into this world to save us. Help us enter into this advent season with the same longing, curiosity, and wonder as the Magi before us. And may we too find you so we can offer you our worship. Amen.

Stephanie Ehmke, MFB Peoria Church Partner



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18

With eyes wide open to the mercies of God. I beg you, brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give your bodies as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him, and acceptable by Him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds, from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands, and moves forward the goal of true maturity. - Romans 12:1-2 JB Phillips

Three key points come out of this portion of scripture. ACCEPTANCE, ADJUSTMENT, ADVANCE.

ACCEPTANCE - the living sacrifice. I beseech you, therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. God calls us to make a choice about the way that we live for Him, we are not our own (1 Peter 2:5). God wants visible, lived-out, bodily evidence that our lives are built on His mercy.

ADJUSTMENT - As we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, God makes our life holy by burning away all impurities. For example, The world system - the popular manner of thinking that is rebellion against God is an ungodly pattern that we must resist (Romans 6:13).

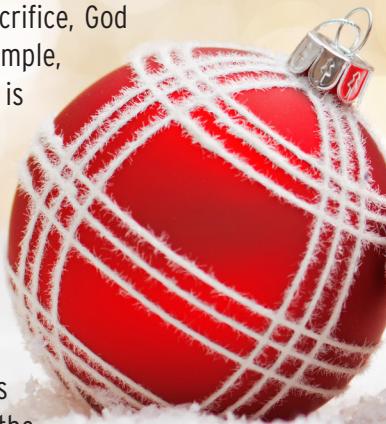
ADVANCE - God is calling us to advance. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind. By focusing on God's Word and fellowship with Him, then your life will be in the will of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). This transformation and renewing of our minds takes place as we behold the face of God, spending time in His glory at the secret place.

Prayer: Father God, Help me give my body to You as a living sacrifice. Re-mold my mind from worldly thinking into Your plan. May my life show Your love and bring glory to You. Amen.

Lilly Oyare, MFB East Africa Nonprofit Partner

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19

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

One day a missionary serving in Kenya saw an old woman carrying a heavy load of firewood. In compassion, he stopped his truck and offered to let her ride in the bed. After a few minutes, he looked in his rearview mirror and was surprised to see her still carrying her heavy load. He thought, "Doesn't she realize the truck is able to carry both her and her heavy load?"

How often do we carry unnecessary burdens - loads of pain, hurt, and disappointment? Even when we know that Christ is carrying us, we refuse to lay down that which burdens our hearts. Do we realize that Jesus has the power to carry us and our heavy load?

Knowing the Lord will take care of us in an awesome thing. Part of His care is shouldering our burdens. How can He help us when we insist on carrying heavy loads by ourselves? We need to let go of the burdens. He will take care of us.

Prayer: Lord, today I choose to release the weight of the burdens I carry. I place all these issues and concerns into Your powerful hands, knowing that You will take care of me. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

Pastor Masha, MFB East Africa Volunteer



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 2 Corinthians 2:14-15

What are some of your favorite smells? The air after it rains? Burning wood? Lavender? Freshly mowed grass? Pine needles? What about food-related smells? Cookies fresh from the oven? Citrus? Coffee?

We all love breathing in our favorite odors. Sometimes we'll stop what we are doing and slowly breathe in a fragrance, closing our eyes and savoring the moment. Maybe certain memories are brought to mind or pleasant feelings overtake us. Our sense of smell is powerful. No other sense connects us to memories or emotions as much as scent does.

Second Corinthians tells us that, as followers of Jesus, we should have a distinctive aroma - the aroma of Christ. Rather than a literal fragrance, this is a figurative odor. The "fragrance" of Christ would include attributes such as peace, joy, and love. When you enter a room, do you bring the fragrance of Jesus with you? Do gentleness and kindness fill the air? When you leave, do people recognize the lingering aroma of Jesus?

Everyone is aware of their literal fragrance. We use scented shampoo, shower gel, deodorant, and other fragrant products. Our figurative fragrance is so much more important. Wherever we go, we want to bring and leave the fragrance of Jesus.

Prayer: Father, grant me the grace to carry the aroma of Christ wherever I go. Cover my natural odor with the beautiful fragrance of Jesus' love. Let others see and "smell" You in my words and actions. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Phil Hodel, MFB Employee



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
Matthew 11:28 NIV

What a kind invitation! Who among us has never felt weary? Or burdened? What do we most want and need in those difficult times? Rest.

One of the things contributing to our weariness is our burdens. Burdens can be physical trials, emotional struggles, loss (job, loved ones, financial security), or feelings of hopelessness. Our burdens are like a heavy weight on our backs, pressing us down.

This year we have all faced uncertainty, which often leads us to a sense of fear. We can try to have a positive attitude, or lean on friends to help us, but these fall short of Jesus' help. What does Jesus tell us to do? His words are easy to understand and follow: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Not just some, but ALL can bring their burden to Him. We just bring them to Him and He gives us rest.

You may be carrying burdens right now. Aren't we all bearing a heavier load in 2020? How are you dealing with them? Have you accepted Jesus' loving invitation to bring them to Him? Take time today to bring your burdens to Jesus. And, then savor the rest He gives you in return.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive me for trying to manage my burdens on my own. Thank You for Your Word reminding me that I can bring them to You. Here is what is weighing me down today ...

David Kieser, MFB Founder and President

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22

Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee ... and I have loved thee ... Isaiah 43:1-2, 4 KJV

Throughout the Bible, God tells those who are called by His name that He will be their God and they will be His people.

"thou art mine" God says to His people be not afraid of anything because you belong to Me, you are Mine. God knows each of us: our names, our hurts; our joys; our past; our needs; everything.

"I will be with thee" God promises security and protection. God assures us that He is with us and nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:39). At times, we may feel alone or overburdened, but no matter what our circumstances, He is with us.

" thou wast precious in my sight" We are precious to God. He allowed His Son, Jesus Christ, to be sacrificed on the cross so He could draw us into a relationship with Him. Each individual has value and is precious to God.

Finally, God tells us, **"I have loved thee"**. "You are Mine; I will be with you; you are precious to Me, I love you." God knows all about us, and yet he loves us and longs to call each of us by His name. Nothing could be more important or valuable in life than a relationship with the Living God. Are you called by His name? Are you redeemed?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I come to You to repent and confess my sins, knowing that You are faithful and just to forgive my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I profess Jesus Christ as the risen Son of God who died to save and redeem me. I believe You raised Jesus from the dead, and He lives and stands at Your right hand making intercession for me, a sinner. Lord Jesus, come into my heart, and provide to me Your Holy Spirit to comfort, instruct, and lead me according to the Will of God. It is in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Tom Keith, MFB Florida Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23

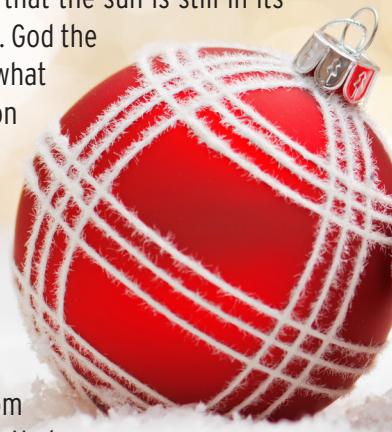
For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. - Romans 8:18 ESV

Unemployment, death of loved ones, fear of COVID, isolation, racial divide - one heart-breaking news story is layered upon another. Routines are disrupted. Gatherings are modified. Traditions are broken. The present times are hard. The negativity and despair are as easy to pick up as a winter cold.

Many think December 31, 2020, can't come soon enough. It is easy to place our hope in 2021, a vaccine, economic growth, political stability, unrestricted travel and, most of all, safely gathering with friends and family allowing us to resume long-established church, work, and school routines. But are we setting ourselves up for disappointment by placing our hope in a return of life to "normal?" God's gift for us is much greater than any of these circumstances. God sent His son to enter into the disordered mess of humanity.

Dark, cloudy days cast gloom on our spirits, yet we know that the sun is still in its regular orbit producing light and energy to sustain our life. God the creator is always present and sustaining us, no matter what the world in front of us looks like or how dire the situation appears.

Consider Mary, the mother of Jesus - an unwed, pregnant teenager. Her current reality was that she would be disgraced, rejected, and scourged for her circumstances. She faced the reality of baring a child, long prophesied in scripture. First, she had to remember what she knew the ancient scriptures foretold. She also had a direct word from God in the form of an angel to get her through her crisis. Had Mary not had a firm foundation in scripture and had she not listened closely to God's voice, she would have succumbed to fear.



This advent season, may we remain rooted in the word of God and listen closely to His Voice. May this be the source of our hope in trying times.

Prayer: Lord, I bring you my fears, my trials, and my sufferings. I place my hope in You and not the world around me. Today, I will look for You Glory to be revealed through Your Word and Your voice. Amen

Jada Hoerr, MFB Employee

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24

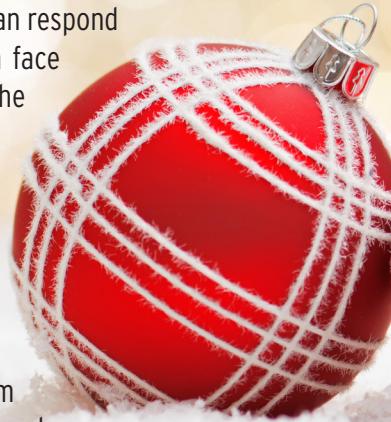
It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever.
Psalm:136:23 ESV

Simple shepherds attending their flocks were some of the first on earth to hear from a host of angels the glorious proclamation of the birth of the long-awaited Savior. As a class, shepherds had a bad reputation, were unreliable, and were not even able to give testimony in a court of law. I can't imagine a lowlier group in those days. They were humble, nomadic, smelly, simple-minded, and the outcasts of society. They were unlikely to be anyone's first choice to hail a king, or even enter his presence.

But God chose them in their humble state to be visited by angels and to be the heralds of the birth of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, his own Son, Jesus Christ. God is not a respecter of persons, as he understands completely the heart and humanity of his creation. God loves us even though much like the shepherds we have faults and failings and fall short of his Glory. But even in our sinful state, Christ chose to love each of us as his own. Jesus' love for you is unconditional and immeasurable and he wants to meet you where you are. Like the shepherds, we can respond to the angel's good news and by faith, rush to meet him face to face or we can choose to be lulled back to sleep in the darkness of this world. I pray during this season you will find your hope in the one who humbly gave himself for you, Emmanuel, God with us!

Prayer: Father God, thank You for sending Your only son into this world in the humble form of a baby - the spotless Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world - past, present, and future. May we, like the angels You sent from above, and shepherds below, rejoice in his birth. In awe and wonder let us be compelled by faith to accept Your gift of our precious Savior Jesus Christ, and like the shepherds, spread the good news of the gospel to all we know. Amen

John Whitaker, MFB Indiana Employee



Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional