

FROM REFLECTION AND PRAYER TO FAITHFUL ACTION...

Use the space below to gather your thoughts and intentions from your week-long reflection and prayer, focusing on what faithful action you intend to take to improve the lives of children.

My promise...

Children's Defense Fund
25 E Street, NW • Washington, DC 20001
(202) 628-8787
www.childrensdefense.org

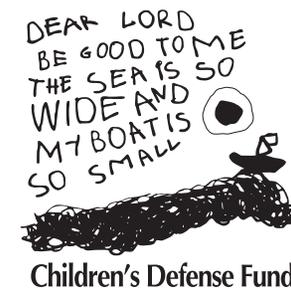
25TH ANNIVERSARY

NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S SABBATHS

CHILDREN OF PROMISE: CLOSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS

Seven-Day Guide for Prayer and Reflection

By Shannon Daley-Harris



MONDAY: CHILDREN OF PROMISE

“God said, ‘Now we will make humans, and they will be like us.’” (Gen. 1:26a Contemporary English Version) Hold a newborn baby in your arms, and as you look at the smooth cheeks and pure gaze, you glimpse such promise — no telling what this child will become. On that first day it is all potential, all yet-to-be. Every child born is filled with promise, made in the likeness of God.

Although each child comes into the world full of promise, almost from the first breath small gaps make it much harder for some children to realize their full potential. Poverty may mean babies and toddlers miss out on nurturing, word-rich environments, creating gaps in early childhood development too great for young minds to catch up easily. Surely this is not what our Creator had in mind for each beloved child who enters the world.

In the coming days as you prepare your heart and mind for the 25th annual National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths, use the blank journaling page opposite each daily reflection here to write your responses, concerns, dreams, and intentions.

Prayer: Source of All, you have created each child full of promise. You have given me a heart to love, a conscience to mind, hands and voice capable of action. Help me to use all that you have given me to work so that all children can live into the fullness of their promise as you intend. Amen.

JOURNALING PAGE

SUNDAY: THE PROMISED COMMUNITY

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

The promised community in the vision set forth in Isaiah is one in which the gaps have closed — between the powerful and vulnerable, the grown and the young, and the different sorts who are living in one seamless, safe, secure community led by a child. The babies, toddlers and preschoolers are safe in places that used to do them harm. In the promised community, there is no place where God's vision, God's intentions for us and our life together, is not known and lived.

Close your eyes and imagine what this vision looks like in our day; dream with the expansiveness, completeness and expectation that Isaiah shared. *Take a moment to do that now.*

What can you do, alone and with others, to work toward that vision this month, this year? By the next Children's Sabbath, in 2017, what do you want to have achieved?

Prayer: Source of Love, Justice and Peace, help me to behold, believe and become part of your vision for our world in which no gaps separate us one from another or from you. Amen.

JOURNALING PAGE

TUESDAY: PROMISED CHILDREN

[God] bought [Abram] outside and said, “Look toward the heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then [God] said to [Abram], “So shall your descendants be.” And [Abram] believed [God]; and [God] reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Gen. 15:5-6 NRSV) God’s promise is children... more than we can count. Children are the very embodiment of God’s promise.

It’s easy to see, hold and love the children in our lives...those we gave birth to, or care for, or come to know. They are some of the children God promised. What’s more challenging is to take in the magnitude of all the children God promised — the billions of children around the world, the 73.6 million children in our nation, 14.5 million of whom are living in poverty.

With data available in our day, we can now “count” the children, but our minds and hearts still find it overwhelming to really take in and understand that each and every one of these children is a child promised by God to us. Every one of those billions of children counts; but our hearts, minds and actions are often too small to include them in the scope of our love, justice, care, and protection. As we approach the Children’s Sabbath, let us commit to change, believing every child counts.

Prayer: God of one and all, help me to know your love for me and for your world. Help me to see every single child as the embodiment of your promise, deserving of love and justice. Guide me to create change for millions I may never meet but whom you know by name. Amen.

JOURNALING PAGE

SATURDAY: THE PROMISE OF LEADERSHIP

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth...(Isaiah 11:1-4a)

Many of the promises in scripture are not named explicitly as promises but nonetheless convey the promised future God intends, notes the *Harper Collins Dictionary of the Bible*, citing Isaiah 11:1-9 as an example.

What a promise: leadership that upholds righteousness, justice and equity for those in poverty and the least powerful. Leadership that doesn't discriminate based on outward distinctions, prejudice, slurs or stereotypes. Is that the standard of leadership we look for today?

As you prepare to vote, talk with your children or grandchildren about the values that are guiding your choices.

Prayer: Eternal, let your spirit rest on and fill me so that righteousness and equity inform my decisions. Help me to call on our leaders to uphold those values too. Amen.

JOURNALING PAGE

“I will bless you to be a blessing...” (Gen. 12:2a NRSV)

When God promises to bless Abram and Sarai (later known as Abraham and Sarah) with children, God is clear that the blessing of a child is not for the adults’ own sake. Abram and Sarai were *blessed to be a blessing* to others.

Like them, we are blessed with children not for our own sakes. God’s blessing comes with the invitation and expectation that we will *be a blessing* to others. Invited into covenant relationship with a God who is faithful to God’s promises, so too we are called to faithful fulfillment of our promises.

In our nation, we promise every child a free and equal public education. But the lottery of geography and under-resourced schools with low expectations and inexperienced teachers widen the gaps for poor children and children of color, often leaving them behind in this economy.

Whether they are promises that we make as a faith community when we welcome children into our midst, our nation’s founding promises, or the more particular promises candidates make during campaigns, how can we ensure those promises are kept? How can we all become a blessing to others?

What promise do you make — to yourself and to the Eternal source of love and justice — that will bless children this year?

Prayer: God, help me to be a blessing to others, especially to children in need of love, justice and opportunity. Amen.

FRIDAY: OPPORTUNITY GAPS

“What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold [Ishmael] fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water....

God was with the boy...(Gen. 21:17-20a) The different paths Isaac and Ishmael’s lives take — through no fault of their own — stand as metaphor for the opportunity gaps that separate children today. The actions of the adults kept one child secure with ready resources and pushed the other child and his mother out at great risk and with few resources.

Today, some children’s feet are set upon a path of promise, toward a future of success, with all of the high expectations, resources, protection and support they need. Other children are propelled along a cradle-to-prison pipeline forged out of racism, poverty, violence and low expectations, often bereft of the health and mental health care, early childhood development, education, resources, protection and support others enjoy.

When hopeless overcomes us, despair at lack of resources overwhelms, and pain at our children’s bleak future engulfs us and them, God hears the cries of our children. Even now, God calls on us lift up the children who are cast down, to hold close the children who have been pushed out, and to be God’s partners in creating a future of hope for all our children.

Prayer: O God, you see my distress and hear the cries of your children in the most desperate circumstances. Help me to act to close opportunity gaps and create the future of promise you intend for every one of your beloved children. Amen.

JOURNALING PAGE

THURSDAY: GOD OF PROMISE

“...The Lord did for Sarah as the Lord had promised.”

(Gen. 21:1b) In Genesis, it is children who embody the fulfillment of God’s promise, become the blessing. As incredible as God’s promise sounded to them, Abraham and Sarah learned that God is faithful to God’s promises, inviting them into covenant relationship.

What are the promises of the Eternal that anchor your faith?

What promises of God do you most want our children to understand and trust?

What promises of God do you seek to embody, to live out, to reflect in your relationships with children and your work on their behalf?

Reflect on God’s incredible promises of justice, love, mercy, of a world made new, of liberation, of presence. How can we live into those promises?

Prayer: Everlasting God, you have blessed us with children. You are faithful to your promise. Help me to share and live out your promises of love and justice, care and protection especially for those who are young, vulnerable, excluded or oppressed. Amen.

JOURNALING PAGE
