

Sunday: Keep on walking...

*“For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god,  
But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.”*  
(Micah 4:5)

The “days to come,” when all people centered their life on God with peace and justice, wouldn’t arrive right away. Not all people would do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. But even though other feet strayed from the path, Micah reminded God’s people to keep walking in God’s way.

His words are echoed in the Civil Rights song which affirms:

*Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around, turn me around, turn me around.  
Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around; I’m gonna keep on a-walkin’, keep  
on a-talkin’, Marchin’ down to freedom land.*

Reaching the freedom land of justice and peace won’t be easy or fast. But we can’t stop moving toward it. Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund, wrote of a mountain hike that turned out to be far more difficult and longer than anticipated. It became a metaphor for her lifelong struggle for children. She reflected, “The quest to put children first has required climbing mountain after mountain with no end in sight. But we must not despair. Child advocates must keep moving, putting one foot ahead of the other, basking in the beauty of our children, in the chance to serve and engage in a struggle for a purpose higher than ourselves, and continue to work and pray hard.”

**Prayer:** God, help me to just keep putting one foot in front of the other as I seek to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you, for the sake of your children. Amen.

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## 2013 NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN’S SABBATHS

Seven-Day Guide  
for Reflection and Prayer

### *Beating Swords Into Plowshares: Ending Gun Violence and the Violence of Child Poverty*

By Shannon Daley-Harris



## Monday: In the Days to Come

*“In the days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised up above the hills.”*

(Micah 4:1a, NRSV)

When the current reality is difficult, marked by destruction, defeat, and despair, the phrase “in the days to come” holds promise. It offers hope that the future will be different than the present, that the status quo will not remain always.

Micah, speaking to a people suffering from injustice, violence, and insecurity, held up a vision of days ahead that would be centered on God and God’s intentions for life together.

This very day, when more than 16 million children suffer the violence of poverty in our rich nation and when seven children and teens will be killed by guns, we too need a word of hope, of change, of a promised future that will better reflect God’s intentions for our life together.

As we prepare this week for the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration, read, reflect, and pray to discern God’s word to you about children, poverty, peacemaking, and the call to respond faithfully. May your heart and mind be transformed in the days to come.

**Prayer:** Eternal God, help me to keep you at the center of my life. Grant me the vision to see the world not as it is but as you intend it to be, the faith to believe it will be so, and the persistence to do what I can to bring the change you desire. Amen.

## Saturday: Looking for the Helpers

*“...And no one shall make them afraid;  
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.”* (Micah 4:4b)

Fred Rogers, known to generations of children as “Mister Rogers,” shared that when he himself was a child and frightened by troubling events in the news, his mother wisely guided him to “look for the helpers” in those scary scenes. For a child, even in the midst of a terrifying situation, knowing that there are adults doing what they can to help makes a difference and lessens the fear.

We are working for a day when no one makes our children afraid—when no child is frightened by gunshots ringing out in their neighborhood, no bullies stalk the halls of schools, no hunger haunts an empty dinner table.

Even now, when violence still stalks our children and poverty still haunts their homes, we can guide children to “look for the helpers.” Right now, we can *be* the helpers who work to keep guns out of the hands of those who would harm our children. Right now, we can be the helpers who speak up to ensure that we don’t cut food stamps and other benefits that protect children from poverty’s harsh effects.

One day, we pray, no one will make our children afraid. Let us be the helpers that hasten that day.

**Prayer:** God, you have been my helper all the days of my life—in good times and in bad. Show me how to be a helper so that no child need fear violence, or poverty, or anything that could harm them. Amen.

## Friday: Fruitful

*“But they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees...”* (Micah 4:4a)

Delightfully, improbably, kiwi are growing in a church garden in the Bronx. The kiwi are the product of children’s imagination, effort, and tending. The children in turn are flourishing under the nurturing care of Mother Martha, the rector of St. Anne’s Episcopal Church which runs a CDF Freedom Schools® program in the summer. As Mother Martha prepared to seed the garden, she asked the children what they wanted to plant, and kiwi was their unexpected answer.

The image, in Micah, of each person sitting under their own vines and fig trees conveyed a promise of economic security, when everyone would have a home, food, and a livelihood, as well as physical security.

For everyone in our day to reap the fruits of economic security, we need to plant seeds of opportunity and ensure that all are equipped with tools for employment, beginning with a good education, and then job training and decent jobs at living wages. When storms of life hit, families need protection to help weather them.

Mother Martha is working to loosen the strangling weeds of poverty and watching children blossom and thrive under her care. May we do the same.

**Prayer:** Tender God, Thank you for your loving care and the many ways you have sustained me. Help me to extend your loving care to children and families so that all may have what they need to survive and thrive. Amen.

## Tuesday: Up to the Mountain

*“Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that [God] may teach us [God’s] ways and that we may walk in [God’s] paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”*  
(Micah 4:1b-2)

Climbing a mountain takes preparation, effort, and persistence. The reward is what the view from the top provides: clarity, perspective, and a sense of awe and thankfulness.

In his final speech before a bullet took his life, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., acknowledged, “We’ve got some difficult days ahead.” Yet he affirmed, “I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will get to the promised land.”

Jesus had many mountaintop experiences. It was up on a mountain, according to the Gospel of Matthew, that Jesus proclaimed “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

“Mountain top” experiences can happen anywhere, from the playground to the pew to the protest march. When have you learned something new about God’s way of peace and justice and found companions and courage to walk in God’s path?

**Prayer:** God, grant me the persistence to seek you and the clarity to see the world you intend. Amen.

## Wednesday: Plowshares

*“[God] shall judge between many peoples,  
And shall arbitrate between strong nations far away.  
They shall beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.”* (Micah 4:3a)

In a small Maine town, a sculptor makes his living transforming trash into treasure. A rusty wrench, old spring, metal hose, and handful of nails become a whimsical horse that now adorns a garden. A trowel and broken scissors become a bird that decorates a mantel. The transformations are amazing.

In our passage, the goal is not that weapons will simply be thrown on the trash heap, no longer used to injure and kill. The vision is bigger than that: what used to harm will now help. Instruments of death will now become implements for making a living. Importantly, those who wielded the weapons are the ones who relinquish and transform them. When the people have confidence in God’s justice, they loosen their grip on the weapons and turn them into a source of income.

Children need to be safe from physical violence and they also need to be safe from the violence of poverty. People and communities flourish when they are safe and have sufficient income. How can we create just communities in which employment, not arms, provides security for families? How can we help transform situations of harm into ones of healing?

**Prayer:** God of possibility, transform and use me to bring safety and well-being to children—especially those who now know fear and poverty. Make me an instrument of your peace, I pray. Amen.

## Thursday: The War at Home

*“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
Neither shall they learn war any more...”* (Micah 3b)

In Micah’s day, the gravest threat to the people came from the Assyrian Empire which slaughtered countless people and took others captive. Blood ran in the streets and the people longed for a day when there would no longer be war among nations.

Today, there is a different kind of war that is taking the lives of our children. Over the past 50 years, three times more children and teens died from guns on American soil (166,562) than U.S. soldiers were killed in action in wars abroad (52,280 killed in action in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq.) Nearly three times more children and teens were injured by guns in 2010 (15,576) than the number of U.S. soldiers wounded in action that year in the Afghanistan war (5,247). It is time to end the undeclared gun war that is taking the lives of our children day in and day out.

Gandhi wrote, “If we are to teach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children; and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won’t have to struggle; we won’t have to pass fruitless, idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which, consciously or unconsciously, the whole world is hungering.”

**Prayer:** God of Life, lead me in your way of peace. Mold my heart to know peace internally, shape my words so that I relate to those close to me lovingly, guide my actions to help children everywhere live in peace and safety. Amen.