

Children's Defense Fund

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DEVOTIONAL

DEAR LORD
BE GOOD TO ME
THE SEA IS SO
WIDE AND
MY BOAT IS
SO SMALL



children's
defense fund

SATURDAY

Can You Hear? Can You See?

EXODUS 1:1-14

If the book of Genesis marks the formation of Israel as a family, the book of Exodus marks the beginning of Israel as people. Over the course of the Exodus narrative, they move from people to nation. The very foundations of Israel are formed in the midst of bondage and trauma. Laurel Dykstra, in her book, *The Other Side of Exodus*, posits that too often people in the United States read themselves as Israel when they really should be reading themselves as Egypt. Too often we think that we are the ones being asked to build brick out of straw; to do more with less, when in fact we are the ones commanding labor and actively and passively complicit in the death of innocents.

I have to imagine that not everyone in Egypt hated Israel. I can't believe that Egypt was all bad. In mind I search for their humanity. And yet, there in the text we see outrageous characterizations of Israel, unjust labor policies, a lack of food equity, and rupture in the concept of community because somewhere in the history of this people division and hierarchy persisted.

Prayer

God, help me to see the ways that I have participated in unjust systems. Never let me be ignore the suffering in my midst, and grant me new compassion so that I can let go of stereotypes that keep me from seeing the beauty in every child and family.

What happens if we take a step back and read the text from multiple angles? Can you see yourself as Egypt? Even if you are not pharaoh are you in some way complicit in the suffering of another person? Before we can be active participants in God's desire for healing and justice we have to repent. Before we can repent, we have to realize the ways that we have participated in ruptured systems.

Every day in this nation families are being asked to do more with less. As social services are being cut and prices are rising, we have to do more to ensure that people and families are not being vilified but protected.

State of America's Children

Income and wealth inequality are growing and harming children in low-income, Black and Brown families. Today, a member of the top 10 percent of income earners makes about 39 times as much as the average earner in the bottom 90 percent.

SUNDAY

Who Will You Follow?

EXODUS 1:15-22

It is difficult to be in the presence of greatness. Sometimes it is downright intimidating. These things can manifest in large and small ways. Sometimes a friend gets jealous when another friend has mastered a sport or a craft that they've just never been able to get a handle on, and sometimes we see leaders with so many insecurities that they make unimaginable and inhumane decisions.

In recent years we have seen a proliferation of policies that not only put our children at risk but actively do them harm. There has been too much rhetoric about "us" vs "them." We've made enemies out of too many human beings and it has kept us from holding our nation's leaders accountable for the atrocities that are being committed in our names.

Sure, the biblical literature suggests that pharaoh would have been a god in Egypt. The people seemingly didn't have enough power to stop him from what he was doing. Yet the text tells us that Shiphrah and Puah, who were given a direct command to kill children refused to participate. They didn't fight with pharaoh; they did argue the theological merits of their point. They simply refused to adhere to the edict.

What I love most about these women is that the Hebrew text makes it unclear whether they were Hebrew themselves, or simply midwives to the Hebrew women. Their cultural identity is secondary to their commitment to justice; to their understanding of what it is that God would require of them.

God gives them a spirit of bravery to stand up and fight in the best way that they knew how.

State of America's Children

Our children have lost the health coverage they need to survive and thrive at an alarming rate. Roughly 4.4 million children under age 19 were uninsured; these rates are especially high among Hispanic children, undocumented children, children living in the South, and children in families with lower incomes.

Prayer

God, grant us the courage to speak even when we feel disempowered. Help us to say no to policies that put our children at risk.



MONDAY

Walk Along Side Me

EXODUS 2:1-5

When we left the house as children my mom always told my siblings and I to stick together. She was generally anxious about the world, and what it might do to her children so for her, it was safer if we all stuck together.

We have all heard those saying, “there is power in numbers”. I would argue that most things in life are easier when you have someone else with you. It is easier to stay awake on road trips. Less exhausting to move furniture. You get the point. All of that to say, sometimes we just need someone or some people to walk alongside us in life.

In this pericope of Exodus. Moses has defied the odds. His mother was able to secretly and safely usher him into the world in the midst of a dangerous edict that called for his death. Now, for the next challenge.

Prayer

Lord, grant me the wisdom to walk alongside America’s children. I want to be a part of watching over them and being sure that they safely make it from shore to shore in life.

His mother, Jochebed can’t him because his tears, his crying will give them away. So, she sets him on the river in hopes that he survives. Miriam, his sister walks along the river to make sure that he survives. Ultimately Moses is drawn out of the river at the command of pharaoh’s daughter, and the woman in the royal court raised him.

For most of us, the only way we make it in life is if someone walks alongside us. Think about the various people in your life that God sent to walk alongside you.

How is God calling you to walk alongside someone else? How can you walk alongside children of America to ensure they make it to safe and nurturing space?

State of America’s Children

The number of children in the child welfare system fell for the first time in 2020, but too many children wind up in foster care because of poverty. Black and American Indian/Native American families are disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system.



TUESDAY

Rattling Sound

EZEKIEL 37

The prophet Ezekiel was an exile, an immigrant living in a deportee settlement. He has seen destruction and death. He is seeing despair and disdain in people all around him. So, of course he has a vision about dry bones. Of course, what he sees is a valley of long dead people.

Yet in the valley with God, he wanders through the desolation and he sees possibilities. God makes him go in and out of these dead people and recover something about life.

When the dry bones start to rattle it disrupts the desolate nature of the scene. Here in the midst of a seemingly dead context life springs forth. Bone is connected to bone; sinew is connected to sinew. Breathe is restored not only to the individual but once the individual rises up, the community connects and the people are one.

Prayer

God, let us be bold enough to walk in the valley. Open our eyes that we see the tremors and our ears that we may hear the rumbling of change.

It is easy to feel defeated. In the midst of COVID, school shootings, other gun violence, unfair incarceration, and the list goes on. However, God is not calling us to run away from these issues. Instead, if we would walk around in them, we might just find a rattling sound. The murmurs of hope springing forward and new life beginning not only for the individual but also for our community and our world.

There are new movements of justice that are springing forth so that democracy might prevail and human dignity can be preserved. Can you hear the rattling sound? Are you willing to go into the valley to find hope?

State of America's Children

America's schools continue to slip backwards into patterns of deep racial and socioeconomic segregation, perpetuating achievement gaps.

Sixty percent of Black children attended high-poverty schools in 2017-2018, with a high share of students of color. Fewer than nine percent of children attended similar schools.

WEDNESDAY

We Deserve to Be Well

3 JOHN 1:2

The beginning of 3 John sets the scene for a private interaction between the author and recipient. What follows is a letter of instruction about how the recipient can be hospitable to those around them. Gaius is called upon to be faithful to friends, even friends who are strangers. He is called on to demonstrate the love of God and the church by doing good in the world.

But before this command goes forward the Johannine writer says, "I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health."

Everyone deserves to be well—physically, emotionally and spiritually. We have to take care of ourselves so that we are sustained care for others.

The resources for wellness should not be reserved for the privileged few but shared among the whole of the community.

Prayer

God, may we always ask if the children are well. May we slow down and take of ourselves and one another. May we be agents of sabbath and jubilee.

Are you well? Are you tending to your own health?

If you are well, ask yourself how we can show up in the world so that people can have the access to good healthcare so we might be a more fully formed community.

State of America's Children

Our children have lost the health care coverage they need to survive and thrive at an alarming rate. An estimated 4.4. million children under 19 were uninsured.

THURSDAY

Can You Hear? Can You See?

1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-31

The beauty of growing older can be autonomy. When you are a child, you rely on someone else for everything. Someone has to feed, clothe, bathe you. But as you get older and your motor skills improve and your cognitive ability develops, most people are able to do more on their own. Freedom.

The United States calls itself “the land of the free...” It is a badge of honor to have rights and liberties. In theory to be able to make decisions about who you are and how you will live in the world. Freedom.

But the Pauline author makes some important claims and asks some important question in 1 Corinthians 10. Corinthians reminds us that just because you can do something doesn't mean that you should. Just because there is a legal system that permits something doesn't mean that it is just.

Prayer

Lord, help us to create a system of rehabilitation and not of condemnation. Help us to see the infinite possibilities in front of us to create a more just world.

The point of freedom is not to lord it over one another but instead to use that freedom for the good of humanity.

We are free to care for one another. We are free to have compassion on one another. We are free to create equitable systems that are focus are healing people, not punishing them. For those of us who are free and believe in freedom, we must ask how are we using our freedom.

State of America's Children

A disproportionate number of children of color are incarcerated in the juvenile justice and/or adult criminal justice systems, placing them at risk of physical and psychological harm.

FRIDAY

Can You Hear? Can You See?

EXODUS 1:1-14

There are some of us in life who really do not function well with incomplete tasks. For me, if I haven't finished a task well before the deadline, my palms get tingly; I lose my appetite. It is too much. So, I try to have a plan.

Usually when I'm not motivated to do the work, I adopt "willing suspension of disbelief"—an Aristotelian principle referencing the avoidance of logic when engaging something that feels unrealistic or impossible. It is often referenced in scholarship about literature or theater. But for me, I use it to deal with the hard things of life. Especially when it feels like I can't do something I just ignore my logic and get caught up in the possibility that I can do it.

I don't know if it will always work but I wonder if we adopted this mentality sometimes, it would make us better disciples. I know there seem like a bunch of things that you can't do but with God all things are possible. You have to ignore some logic to know that God can complete a lot of things in you.

Prayer

God, I believe. Help my unbelief. I believe that we can make positive change for America's children.

That being said, I choose to believe that no matter what the world looks like now, we will come to our senses and make our children a priority. God has to complete this thing.

However, we are not intended to be passive agents in God's will for the world. Ask yourself, how can you be a part of the completion—the perfect will of God being made manifest in the lives of our children. No poverty. No hunger. No inequitable school systems. Completion.

State of America's Children

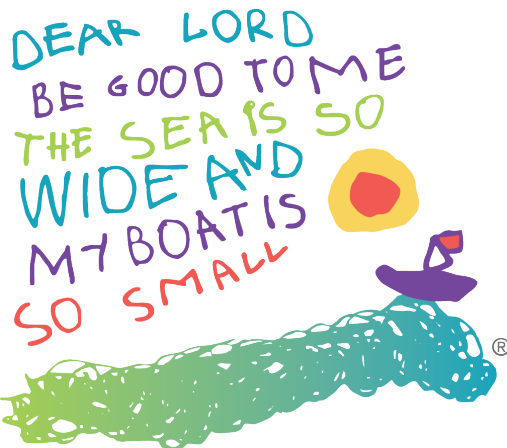
Children remain the poorest age group in America, with children of color and young children suffering the highest poverty rates.

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WORSHIP RESOURCES



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CALL TO WORSHIP (Call and Response)

“This, We Believe”

You are a God who is able to make all things right and justice
This, we believe

You are a God who loves us from cradle to grave and beyond
This, we believe

You are a God who is calling us to be agents of change in this world
This, we believe

You are a God who will be with us as we advocate for the most
vulnerable
This, we believe

You call us to pray with our hands, our mouths, and our feet
This, we believe

You are calling us to create a just world for all of your children
This, we believe

You have given us all that we need fight for a better, safer tomorrow
for children, and families of all races, religions, and socio-economic
status
This, we believe

Let us worship a God who creates and cares and loves. Let us
worship on this Children’s Sabbath Day



CALL TO WORSHIP (Biblical)

Psalm 63:1–4

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.

God, we come into this space earnestly seeking you. That you might call us forth to do the work of justice to build a world where all God's children can dwell together safely, without markers of status and wealth and poverty. We call on you to remind us that as we seek you, we must seek justice, equality and peace for you a God that desires order and commands love. Come let us praise God with our lips and honor him with our hands and feet.



PRAYERS

Prayer of Confession

God, we confess that we have been respecter of person, caring for only that which we have deemed ours and not all that you claim as yours. We acknowledge that we have been participants in greed, violence, oppression, hurt, disparity. We acknowledge that we have created too many systems filled with poverty and lack. Convict us, O Lord, of our apathy. Forgive us as we repent and participate in your vision for the world.

Prayer for Courage

Eternal One, we pray that you give us the strength to call out systems of oppression.

Give us eyes to see the injustice

Give ears to hear the pain and suffering.

Give us a heart to move outside of our comfort zone.

Grant that we never tolerate a child who is hungry.

Make us instruments to care for not only our children but that families that you have called to nurture them.

Remind us that you have called us to beloved community that can not be realized in broken democracy.

Make us uncomfortable with our silence.

Call us into the work of leadership and advocacy so that our tomorrows will be better than our yesterday and our today.



PRAYERS

Eucharistic Prayer for Children's Sabbath

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.
It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
always and everywhere to give thanks
to you,

Short Prayer: God, on this Children's
Sabbath, we give thanks for the
children you have placed in our midst.
May we always regard them as your
highest blessing, and be committed to
their blessings in ways large and small.



HYMNS

Prayer of Celebration:

God, we thank you that throughout history you have protected the innocents.

Thank you for bringing fortitude and courage to the women who protected Moses so that we might remember that we are all called to be present for our children.

Thank you for causing Elizabeth's baby to leap in her womb so that we can remember that there is joy and promise in the blessing of all God's children.

And, thank you for sending magi, wise men to bless Jesus so that we recall that it our work to provide resources and covering for all your children.

We praise you because we know that because you were present in all of those stages of Jesus' early life, he grew to be healthy, happy, and whole, and was able to usher in a new covenant.

End of Communion Blessing:

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in a ministry of justice in all the world.

Amen.



PRAYERS

General:

Sweet Hour of Prayer

Isaiah 11:1-10

Baptist Hymnal #18: Come Thou Font of
Every Blessing

UMC Hymnal #209: Blessed Be the God
of Israel

Jeremiah 31:27-34

African American Heritage Hymnal #
567: Here I am, Lord

Contemporary Music

We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot
Rest (Sweet Honey in the Rock)
This is America (Childish Gambino)