



## DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

In keeping with the Peace Sunday theme of learning from the global church, these devotionals centre around stories from MCC's Palestinian, South Sudanese, Colombian and Korean friends and partners and explore the Scriptures that have guided them in ministry.

In facing division, violence, inequality and war, these believers have become bold: they acknowledge trauma, empower victims, negotiate reconciliation and invite oppressors to repent. As the South Sudan Council of Churches wrote in their statement Peace Now: "Vomiting out the truth' is a necessity to bringing people together again."

May their stories challenge us to speak and act boldly in defence of hope.

### EACH DEVOTIONAL CONTAINS THESE ELEMENTS:

**Experience:** An activity to engage the senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch, movement) in a way that fosters engagement with and memory of the story, for both children and adults.

**Respond:** Ideas for how to live out God's teaching.

**Receive:** A prayer of opening our hearts to the truth we have just heard.

## WE CALL OPPRESSORS DOWN TO EARTH

Read Luke 19:1–10

“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” ... Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”

(LUKE 19:5, 8)

—based on Alejandra Arboleda’s story as told to Marla Pierson Lester

[https://mcccanada.ca/sites/mcccanada.ca/files/media/common/documents/acp\\_summer\\_2018\\_cdn-web.pdf](https://mcccanada.ca/sites/mcccanada.ca/files/media/common/documents/acp_summer_2018_cdn-web.pdf)

When I did some work with MCC partner Edupaz (whose name is a combination of the words education and peace) in Colombia, I was sent to a rural church and community to work on an advocacy plan to show what the community suffered during the violence.

When I arrived, though, people couldn’t even express what had happened to them.

I looked at the importance of people being able to express themselves.

With the pastor, we started to do Bible studies over the next year. We looked at Moses, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, Zacchaeus. We talked about reparations. How did the community feel when Zacchaeus repaid them? For what do people here hope?

Zacchaeus lived in an honour-shame-based culture where the good of the community was more highly valued than individual success. Jesus offered him an opportunity to trade his shameful status as cheating taxation officer (in collusion with the occupier) for a new reputation as philanthropist. In turn, Zacchaeus’ generous act gave the community the hope that, even within an oppressive political system, they had the power to resist evil with good.

The Colombian church was very afraid of being involved in politics, but eventually they had a march for peace, and the community basically told the guerrillas and the army that both needed to repent.

Speaking out was a way of making visible what they believed, and also of protecting themselves.

For what does your community hope? How can you help make their values visible?

**Experience:** Design a poster that portrays your vision of peace and place it in your window. Send a photo to [media@mcccanada.org](mailto:media@mcccanada.org) and your poster might be shared on MCC’s social media.

**Respond:** The next time someone tells you about a painful experience, resist the urge to share your own. Tell the speaker that you are grateful that they have told you their feelings. Learn about trauma healing approaches that MCC’s partners employ here: <https://mcc.org/sites/mcc.org/files/media/common/documents/intersections0303.pdf>.

**Receive:** God, teach me to listen with patience and empathy to those who are hurting in my neighbourhood and around the world. Show me the ways I can walk alongside them.

## WE PULL UP AN EXTRA CHAIR FOR OUR ENEMIES

### Read Psalm 23

**“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”**

(PSALM 23:5)

—SeongHan Kim, MCC Representative for Northeast Asia, “Learn, Pray, Join: At the table with enemies,” May 17, 2018, <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/learn-pray-join-at-the-table-with-enemies/>

I am a South Korean, a child of war refugees, the grandson of internally displaced people. Although we all memorized the verse that says, “Love your enemy;” it felt like this could not possibly apply to North Korea. They were “red” and “communist,” which is evil in this world.

However, one night something happened. In 2018, my aged mother stayed with us for a couple of days at our home. We watched the news together (which is usually not a wise choice).

The news report was about the presidential envoy from South Korea to Pyongyang, North Korea. When my mother saw the smiling face of Kim Jung-un at the conference hall, she told me, “It is hard to imagine how difficult it has been for this young man to lead the country in this tough situation.”

I was stunned because I never heard such a sympathetic response to North Korean leaders from my mother. For her, the leaders of North Korea are pure evil and an absolute danger for many decades. But that evening, somehow my mother saw Kim Jung-un as a young man, a fellow human being.

I think of Psalm 23:5: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” God prepares a table in the middle of conflict and crisis. Then I am curious: when God set the table, is it only for me? I don’t think so. Maybe at God’s table, we will sit down with our enemies. At this table, finally, we will recognize in others the image of God.

Is there anyone in whom you have difficulty seeing God’s likeness? What does the table God is preparing for you look like?

**Experience:** Make soy-sesame tofu using this recipe shared by former MCC worker in South Korea, Donna Rice: [mcc.org/stories/soy-sesame-tofu-south-korea](https://mcc.org/stories/soy-sesame-tofu-south-korea). It is traditional for Korean prisoners to eat tofu on their release date as a symbol of their new life. As you cook and enjoy this dish, discuss the frightening newness suggested by SeongHan’s words, “Maybe at God’s table, we will sit down with our enemies.”

**Respond:** Consider sponsoring the peace training of one church leader for \$20 at <https://mcccanada.ca/learn/what/peace>.

**Receive:** God, we pray with SeongHan Kim for unity between Koreans on both sides of the border.

## WHERE OTHERS SEE DEATH WE SEE SLUMBER

Read Mark 5:21–43

He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!”

(MARK 5:41 NRSV)

—Rev. Naim Ateek, *Kumi Now initiative, Palestine* <https://kuminow.com/bible-study/>

Having endured ongoing suffering under occupation, some Palestinians feel the situation is so hopeless they no longer have the energy to act at all.

Like the people who came to Jairus and announced, “Your daughter is dead, why bother the teacher anymore?” they question why some continue to put time and energy into actively challenging the occupation when it seems like it is impossible for things to change. Sometimes, people may even laugh at these efforts of nonviolent resistance because they seem as futile as Jesus trying to heal a girl that has already been proclaimed dead.

When Jairus hears news that his daughter is dead, Jesus’ response is striking: “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” Jesus’ words ask us to believe that what might seem laughable is, indeed, possible.

It may indeed be foolish for us to hope that through working together with other organizations in Palestine, Israel and our friends in the international community, we can end the occupation. Yet, by God’s grace, here we are, proclaiming that where there is death, we see only slumber. What appears to be dead can rise up. We are committed to remaining steadfast in our hope.

In the story, hope is paired with agency. Both Jairus and the woman actively approach Jesus. Out of love for his daughter, Jairus leaves his home to find the healer.

In a similar display of agency, the bleeding woman courageously reaches out to touch Jesus’ cloak. Jesus says, “Your faith has healed you.” The woman is not a passive recipient of healing but rather an active participant in her own liberation. The story of Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman challenges us to continue to act to liberate the people living in this land, both Palestinians and Israelis.

The everyday language Jesus uses to heal the little girl encourages us to expect miracles. We witness the power of Jesus breaking into the ordinary moments of our lives. We hear Jesus’ command to rise up in our own context—to be liberated from suffering like the bleeding woman and to awake from sleep like Jairus’ daughter.

What hopeful idea do you find laughable? How do you think God would respond?

**Experience:** Can drawings get up and walk? Using a dry erase marker, draw a stick figure on the bottom of a glass pie or cake pan. Slowly pour warm water into the pan beside the figure. Watch your person lift from the glass and move its limbs. How is the water like the Spirit?

**Respond:** In what areas do you feel passive or hopeless? How is God inviting you to rise up?

**Receive:** Lord, give us the energy, courage and expectancy to see you breaking into our everyday moments and respond.

## WE SPREAD PEACE FROM HEART TO TOE

Read John 10

**“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”**

(JOHN 10:10)

—Elizabeth Miller, MCC representative for Colombia, “MCC accompanying the Colombian Anabaptist churches in their witness for peace”, August, 2020, <https://mccintersections.wordpress.com/2020/08/10/mcc-accompanying-the-colombian-anabaptist-churches-in-their-witness-for-peace/>

Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas, former director of the Mennonite peace organization Justapaz (and now director of MCC partner Sembrandopaz), claimed that “peace is life in abundance.” Rooted in Jesus’ words from John 10:10, it came to encapsulate a uniquely Colombian Anabaptist vision of peacemaking.

“For many,” wrote Esquivia, “peace is the absence of war. They have not yet embraced the concept of peace as the fruit of justice, as reconciliation, understanding reconciliation as the reconstruction of lives, of trust, love, respect, and mutual care.”

While MCC does support Anabaptist partners actively working in conflict resolution and mediation, many more have chosen to work with victims, trauma healing, education in marginalized neighbourhoods, agricultural development, community organizing, refugee assistance, documentation of human rights abuses, and ministries with youth and children.

One example is the response of the Mennonite Brethren in Valle del Cauca to the recent influx of Venezuelans in the cities of Palmira and Cali [Colombia]. With MCC’s support, these churches began to provide humanitarian aid to Venezuelans who were showing up at their churches.

Instead of simply handing out food and health kits, however, the Mennonite Brethren visited

participants in their homes and prayed over them; they collected medicines to send back to family members still in Venezuela; they helped to make doctor appointments for people who were sick.

Some Venezuelan participants commented to the pastors, “You are different than the other aid organizations, because you see us as whole people.”

**Experience:** MCC’s Colombian partners use trauma healing practices similar to this one. To care for your self, body and mind, take a deep breath in through your nose while counting in your head to 4, then hold your breath for a count of 7. Now exhale through your mouth for a count of 8. Notice how you feel. Think about the way Jesus’ love permeates every cell of our bodies.

**Respond:** To counteract a scarcity mentality, donate high-need items such as cereal, canned meat, peanut butter and toilet paper from your pantry to the local food bank.

**Receive:** Jesus, thank you for bringing life and caring about us as whole people. Teach us to embrace the mindset of abundance, to loosen our grip on possessions and believe that something better than the status quo of inequality, poverty and racism is possible.

## WE KEEP BUILDING

Read Ezra 5:1-17

**“May it be known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It is being built of hewn stone, and timber is laid in the walls; this work is being done diligently and prospers in their hands.”**

(EZRA 5:8 NRSV)

—Ms. Florence Ayikoru Dekili, WEP program coordinator, based on an unpublished reflection submitted to MCC.

The Women Empowerment Program (WEP) believes that women are the bond that ties the society together; by empowering women, we are rebuilding the society which is the temple of God.

WEP is a nongovernmental, voluntary and independent organization, established in 2016 (formerly under the Episcopal Church of Sudan). With support from MCC, we train women in sewing and embroidery and provide startup kits (tailoring machines) to boost women’s earnings, enabling them to provide for their families and attain self-reliance. We also train women in capital formation through savings and micro-credit use to increase their capital base and enhance their incomes for business growth and further investments. And we are strengthening women’s participation in peacebuilding and protection to reduce the prevalence and impact of conflict, violence and gender-based violence in their households.

Ezra 5:8 is a key verse to our ministry. In the book of Ezra, the Israelites met with resistance from enemies both near (chapter 4) and far (chapter 5). In times of frustration, WEP uses this verse as an encouragement that builders are faced with challenges all the time, but they must continue rebuilding the society.

In what areas are you tempted to give up?

**Experience:** Start at the bottom of a flight of stairs or with your fingers at the bottom of a pillow. Climb the steps or walk your fingers up slowly, taking time at each step to name a challenge you’ve met this week. Acknowledge God’s presence in each of these moments.

**Respond:** Consider ordering a meal or product from a small local business run by women, owned by a racialized community or intentionally employing newcomers. What are other ways you can build a more empowering society for those who have been marginalized?

**Receive:** God, make us bold to keep building a more just society.

## WE ADD LOVE TO OUR HOPE

Read James 2:14–26

“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.”

(JAMES 2:26 NRSV)

—Rev. Ashraf Tannous, adapted from story by Emily Loewen

<https://mcc.org/stories/land-bible>

Our hope, faith and love do not come from the people themselves, but they come from heaven, from Jesus Christ the one who taught us how to hope, how to love and how to appreciate our life here.

But it's a struggle for my congregation, Beit Sahour in Palestine, to keep faith alive. Most of the time we ask God to end occupation, to live a very beautiful life, peaceful life. And when we don't get these prayers fulfilled, when people don't get it, they feel they are left by God.

This is the land of the birth, this is the land of resurrection, this is the land of ascension, this is the land of the humiliation of Jesus, this is the land of everything.

It's also the land where members of my own family were forced out of their home during the war in 1948. They fled to Jordan where five of my aunts and uncles still live, unable to return because they don't have the necessary Palestinian identification papers.

Christians all over the world unfortunately don't know that there are Christian brothers and sisters in Palestine, fighting for the justice, fighting for freedom. I like this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Faith without hope is sick.” But I would take it further, asking Christians to build relationships and advocate for justice.

We need your support. Not in money, but in prayer, in moral support, and in telling our story.

Faith without hope, without love, without bridge building, without working for the others, without cooperating with the others, without working against humiliation and check points and walls is also sick.

When you imagine a healthy faith, what picture comes to mind?

**Experience:** Think of someone you admire: write out the ways they add hope to their faith, love to their hope and action to their love.

**Respond:** Learn more about the experience of Palestinian Christians by reading <https://mcc.org/learn/where/middle-east/palestine-israel/faq>. Share what you have learned in a conversation this week.

**Receive:** May all in Palestine and Israel live in peace and safety.

## WE DO THE POSSIBLE

Read Romans 12:9–21

**“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”**

(ROMANS 12:18)

—*Mama Gladys, South Sudan Council of Churches regional facilitator for Equatoria Region, , based on an unpublished reflection submitted to MCC.*

By its very nature, the church is a peacemaker; it is who we are, not just a project that we do.

I myself was born in and during war. I became a mother and now a grandmother in this terrible war situation. Enough is enough.

We are all children of God and followers of Jesus Christ entitled to be peaceful as our Almighty God is the God of peace. As a South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) regional facilitator, I thank God that I am part of the process to make our people peacebuilders in this country, so that we can see our children going to school, our mothers delivering in a safe and sustainable health centre, and farmers going to their garden to cultivate.

SSCC is an ecumenical body of seven member churches and associate churches with a strong legacy of peacebuilding. With MCC’s help, SSCC supports community dialogues which help communities understand the root causes of conflicts, acknowledge the abuses perpetrated by community members against each other, facilitate healing and reconciliation, negotiate formal commitments for durable peaceful cohabitation, and work towards individual and community-based recovery.

In our work, we are driven by the Word of God, through Paul’s letter to the people of Rome: “Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.”

Peace is more than just the absence of war, and we commit ourselves to this long-term process. Our people have suffered enough.

**Experience:** Pray Romans 12:9b as a breath prayer. On your next exhale, say in your head, “Hate what is evil,” and as you inhale, think, “Cling to what is good.” Repeat several times, breathing deeply. When you feel anxious or frustrated today, stop where you are and breathe this prayer.

**Respond:** Think of someone who irritates you. Ask God to show you one thing about them that God loves. Is there a small act of kindness toward them that feels possible?

**Receive:** God, show us what is possible with your help.