



GROWING
HOPE
G L O B A L L Y



Advent Devotional

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.”

Proverbs 13:12



THE WAITING



“Waiting is the hardest part.” The American musician, Tom Petty, put it well in his song, The Waiting. Advent is the season of waiting to celebrate the birth of Jesus the Christ. In our consumer culture, the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is often confused as the time to buy stuff and listen to Christmas songs. We at Growing Hope Globally hope that these few words can help you reflect on the true meaning of waiting for Christmas.

Thank you so much for being part of our collective effort to grow lasting solutions to hunger. You are part of a family of farmers, pastors, program directors and managers and regular people following Jesus in the United States and around the world. That is what is reflected by the contributions we have in this Advent devotional. We are grateful for our partners overseas, whose work we help to fund, and those connected with Growing Projects here in the US who make that possible. We want you to hear their voices. And know that we are all part of God’s big family, striving to love and care for one another.

We wait together for a time when hope is not deferred, and our hearts are not sick with injustice and suffering. We wait for when our longings for justice and mercy are fulfilled. We wait for a time when “every tear is wiped from our eyes, death is no more and mourning and crying and pain are no more” (Revelation 21:4). We wait not just to celebrate Jesus’ birth, but also Jesus’ return.

Many blessings this season and beyond.



Max Finberg is the President of Growing Hope Globally. He resides in Maryland, with his wife Kate, daughter Eliana and son Matthias.

WAITING AND GROWING



Are you one of those people who has a hard time waiting? Maybe you find yourself a little short on patience - I know I do at times, especially during the Advent Season, with all the holiday rush and busy schedules and activities. Ironically, Advent was created in the calendar as a time of waiting and preparation – a time to look forward to the future and promises fulfilled. For Christians, it is a time reflecting on the history of preparing for the Messiah to come to the earth as well as anticipating Christ’s return to usher in eternity.

What are we to do during this time of waiting, of preparation? Are we in “neutral”, waiting for God to act, or is there something we should be engaged in doing as an active part of our preparation? The partnership between God and us is replicated all around us, and involves the word trust.

In agriculture, from gardeners to small holder farmers to large scale operators, humans prepare the soil for planting, plant seeds and tend the crop as it emerges (fertilize, water, etc.). We trust that God will cause the seed to grow into a plant or crop that will bear fruit and result in an opportunity for harvest.

The analogy to faith growth is remarkable. The Holy Spirit prepares our hearts to receive the Gospel. We respond by inviting Christ into our hearts as Savior and Lord is planting the seeds of faith. We then have the privilege of nurturing that emerging faith through Bible study, prayer, and fellowship while discovering and using our God-given gifts for serving God and neighbor while anticipating the harvest of righteousness (Christ’s coming).

How are we doing nurturing our “faith plants”? Are we growing a healthy, deepening relationship with God? Are we encouraging others to join us in exploring growing deeper roots of faith and trust in God’s provision? Are we living a “thank-filled” life by eagerly and enthusiastically sharing with neighbors?

On one of my Growing Hope Globally trips to Chiapas, Mexico a few years ago, I saw this principle illustrated perfectly. In a village, where their community project was primarily focused on producing food for sale in a market, individual families also grew gardens for their families to improve nutrition and health, particularly for the young. After their cash crops were harvested, villagers harvested seeds, stored them in two liter bottles and then shared them with each other for their gardens the next year. This allowed each family to share in the harvest by expanding the variety of vegetables they were able to serve their families. They also exchanged recipes on food preparation and passed on some family history about how their relatives prepared similar dishes.

I am committing myself this year to not waste the advent season, but instead to grow and share with my neighbor, whether they are next door or half-a-world away. I would like to invite you to join me on the journey while eagerly awaiting the coming of Christ.



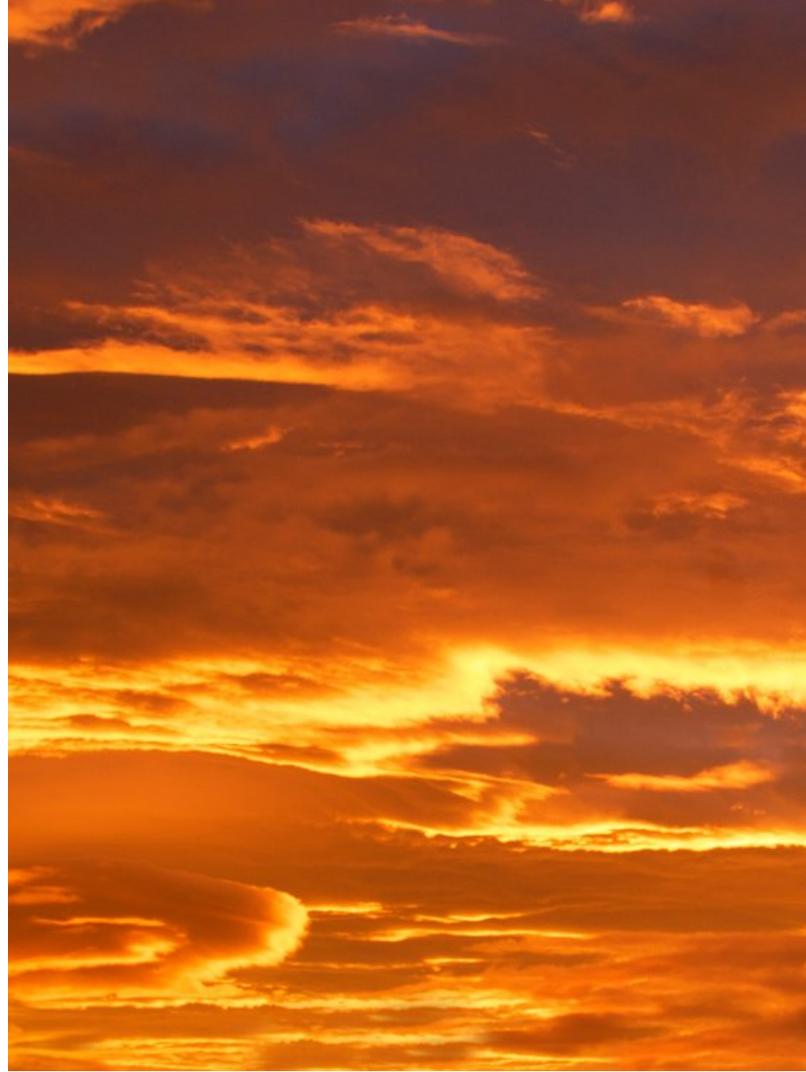
The Rev. Kerry W. Carson is the retired (but still busy) Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Conrad, Iowa and a founding member of the A-maize-ing Grace Growing Project. He continues to be active in Growing Hope Globally, assisting staff on several projects as a volunteer. He is married to Marijke and has two adult children – Leigh and Drew. They continue to live in Conrad, Iowa, USA.



THE LIGHT OF DAWN

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.

Luke 5:12-13



The light of dawn always inspires me. After the long dark night from sleep, looking at the morning light and having a deep breath gives me the feelings that God loves us all and everything around us and He cares about all and this light God has created for all of us to enjoy.

But the COVID had almost collapsed my hope and trust on God. When me and my daughter were tested positive, I felt “Why me, why my daughter?” even though we were so careful. Immediately we felt the isolation and fear of death, frustration where to go, even simply what to do. In the hospital, knowing my wife tested positive, I had the same question I asked “Why us?” I almost lost my hope and we three of us cried as if we will not get well and survive, knowing from news that many of the people are suffering and dying and there is nothing that can be done. I felt so frustrated with my role in the organization, our commitment to the staff and community. A feeling of numbness as fastened with string all around me jailed in an isolated island where nobody can come and rescue us.

Having immediate oxygen gave me a little hope with my breathing. Seeing so many COVID positive patients around us gave us a mixed feelings of fear and hope that this is not only us and there is hope for recovery. We three of us continued praying “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” and gaining strength bit by bit every moment.

After 10 days I came to the corridor of the hospital with my daughter seeing the outside, the light, and to feel the strength from God “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Mathew 11:28). On 13th day we all tested negative and returned home. We felt so relieved and peace in our heart with our gratitude to God that God loves us so much and He care about us and now this is our time to know what God wants us to do. We understood that this is our weakness to know the greatness of God.

Sometime we become so hopeless like a deaf person not hearing what God is saying to us, like a blind person cannot see what God wants us to see, and like a lame person not having strength to walk where God wants us to go. We do not seek God asking “If you are willing.” and rely on the greatness of God. The pandemic has knocked us to build our connection with God to seek His light in our hearts.



O Lord we are so sorry for losing our trust on you, God you are great and loving. God thank you for strengthening our trust. God let us know our faults and live the way you want us to live. God give us the strength to take the challenge in your way and give peace in our hearts. Amen.



I am Apurba Ghagra, serving as Director of SATHI, a local partner organization of Growing Hope Globally and World Renew Bangladesh. I am a self-made person from the remote village of Bangladesh. I am enthusiastic to learn and try to work out which interests me. Walking in the field of this development journey from 1991. Feels the commitment to serve the community in need, get inspiration from the people with changed and happy lives. Currently implementing a project on Nutrition Focused Agriculture under the partnership of Growing Hope Globally and World Renew.



RESTORED TO GLORIFY



As I thought about this Advent devotional and what to say I believe I have missed a lot in the past by not being as aware of the time of Advent or giving it the recognition and attention it deserves. Praying about it, and researching a lot, has revealed to me the significance and the special time it can and should be for all Christians. A time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of the birth of Christ and the return of Christ at the second coming. Proverbs 13:12, our theme verse, has provided more thought and a reminder of the many blessings and longings fulfilled in my life. My wife, my career, and my health. Just to name a few.

One of the reflection questions given to us was "Where have you seen a longing or desire fulfilled? What was that experience like?" After longing and praying for a woman and a MARRAIGE, like I grew up watching my parents live, He brought Theresa into my life. What a blessing that has been for 34 years. And being a four time cancer survivor, I have longed for and prayed for good health to return after each episode. And I believe God has restored my health, but not without expectations from me. After I have had ample time to recover and return to somewhat normal, I believe God has said, "now, I have restored you not to just exist, but to glorify me."

I use Esther 12:4-7 as a guide for inspiration and moving forward for Jesus Christ. When Esther agrees to go to the King asking him to spare her people, the Jews, knowing she could be killed for it. She goes, after she had been prompted by her cousin Mordecai to speak up with these words, "Perhaps you were created for such a time as this." Her preparation time for this encounter was filled with fasting and prayer. Well, if you read the rest of the book, you will see, her prayers were answered. How could I, or anyone who knows Jesus as their Savior, not want to prepare and wait for his arrival. Not just in the Christmas and Advent season, but every day of every season of our lives.

Jim Elwell is a farmer in Calhoun County, Michigan (Southern Michigan) and a member of a Growing Project. He is married to Theresa.



WHERE IS CHRIST?

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:16



Life seems to be riding on merry-go-round: so many things just repeat like praying, sleeping, brushing, devotion time, breakfast, office, lunch, dinner, praying, sleeping... This becomes so mundane including our prayer life, that we tend to become only more religious and spirituality slowly but steadily creeps out of our life.

One day as one of our staff shared about a Christ-Centered life, I pondered about my prayer that morning. Honestly, there was nothing to suggest about Christ in my prayer. My prayer was all about me, what I desired, what I want, God's protection for my family...the list go on, there was nothing in prayer that gave glory to God or that I desire to glorify God. Even in work I seems to be inspired more by getting praise than being happy how Christ is revealed through my work life. As I searched the Bible, Colossians 1:16 brings me back to square one, my life is through Him and for Him.

The best part is that, all the worries, struggles, pain, and hardship that I face continuously is not mine to hold but God. In good times and in bad times it's about Him and for Him. I am relieved, strengthened, and looking forward to the coming years no matter what lies ahead.



Athui (Guithuilung Daimei) started working in social sector since 2000 with various organizations in mainland India, he decided to come back to North East India and joined North East India Committee on Relief and Development (NEICORD) in 2014. He is presently the Executive Director of NEICORD. Athui is married to Gracy, they have two children, Wilian & Sofia.