

A young boy with a focused expression holds a lit candle. The candle's flame is bright and warm, casting a soft glow on his face. Several white starburst graphics are scattered around the candle, adding a festive and magical feel. The boy is wearing a brown and white checkered shirt with a striped sleeve. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an indoor setting.

CHRISTMAS

DEVOTIONAL

Stories and reflections to prepare your heart for Christmas



We hope these devotionals are a blessing for you and your loved ones this holiday season.

We pray that you draw near to the heart of God and continue to share his love this Christmas.



Christmas is a special time to prepare our hearts for the Savior's coming and to reflect on our faith journeys. We can center our hearts and minds on truths from God's Word amid the busyness of the season.

In this devotional, we offer four reflections—one from a World Vision donor, the others highlighting God's work in our project areas—created to deepen your Christmas worship experience.

WEEK 1

JOY



READ [ISAIAH 35](#)

The joy path

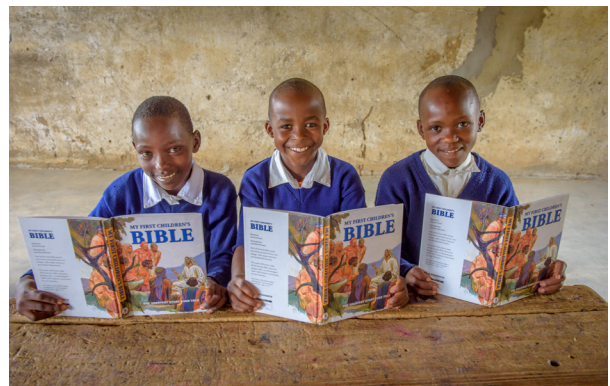
by Sherree Funk, World Vision donor partner

From the moment Adam and Eve fell into sin, God was planning a path for humanity, a path to joy, ending in restoration, reconciliation, and redemption. God has always had a way of upending sorrow and turning it to joy. The path leads through wilderness, trial, temptation, loss, and hardship, yet God provides hope and help along the way.

Throughout the biblical narrative, joy springs up in festival remembrances, miraculous deliverances, military victories, temple rebuilding projects, and answered prayers. Think of the Exodus, David's victory over Goliath, Esther's work to save her people, and the return from the Babylonian exile. Joy happens when God's people move forward in God's plan.

The prophet Isaiah lived in tumultuous times filled with idolatry, materialism, and political oppression leading to poverty. But Isaiah saw God's joy path. Isaiah 35 is a word of hope to the hopeless: The Lord will rescue the redeemed and crown them with everlasting joy! The entire desert will rejoice, and water will gush forth in the wilderness!

As donor partners with World Vision, my husband, Jim, and I have seen this kind of joy time and again as clean water is pumped to remote areas, kept clean in accessible water kiosks, even piped into homes through the efforts of dedicated local water teams. In dry Ethiopian villages, little boys wash their faces and drink clean water. In Rwanda, women dance their appreciation and tell how happy they are to have clean clothes so they can feel good going to church. Other women start a drilling company, using a VisionFund loan. Honduran families build new homes with water points just outside, proud for their children to be able to attend school and have better health. Small children in Zambia learn about handwashing through WASH UP! games and songs, a partnership between World Vision and Sesame Workshop.



Three kids read children's Bibles that World Vision provided for a Christian education class at a school in Mwala, Kenya.

We've also seen this joy when Kenyan schoolchildren receive Bibles. The children learn of God's goodness through His Word and share it with their families. They sing, worship, act out the stories of the Bible, learn how they're created in God's image—how they have a purpose in life. They are finding the joy path to abundant life.

Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah saw the path of joy, the highway in the desert that leads straight to Jesus. He called it the "Way of Holiness" (v. 8)—a path for the redeemed—and prophesied the coming of the Messiah. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace," he says (Isaiah 9:6, KJV).



Yamaranguila, Honduras

And finally, it happened. Luke 2 tells of the night joy came down! "While they were [in Bethlehem], the time came for the baby to be born, and [Mary] gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them" (vv. 6-7). The joy path ran through a humble stable.

When the angels appeared to the shepherds, the joy path led through the fields, through the darkness, and through the fear. "The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord'" (vv. 10-11). And suddenly the sky was filled with heavenly beings praising God. The shepherds ran to find the baby, and the joy path led them straight to Jesus. As Christmas approaches, we rejoice again, for almighty God coming as a tiny baby brings the purest joy!

In His life, Jesus' path led through service and sacrifice and ultimately to the cross. Yet Hebrews 12:2 tells us we're to fix our eyes on Jesus because "for the joy set before him he endured the cross." Joy lies beyond even the most painful death and invites us into new life in Jesus. Heaven reverberates with joyful singing!

The Christian life path leads through service to others. Partnering with World Vision brings us joy as we see the transformed lives and grateful hearts of people flourishing through resources like clean water, loans, Bibles, and spiritual nurture. As we see the smiles on faces of these brothers and sisters, we learn that no matter the sorrow, trials, hardships of this life, God can and will turn grief into joy. And He does the same in our lives, too.

Let us, like all creation, sing together this season as we follow the joy path God has laid out for us. Jesus said, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete . . . Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:11-12).

This is the path to joy.

REFLECT

- › What do you learn from Isaiah 35 about rejoicing in God?
- › What twists and turns have your path taken through life? How have they led you to joy in God?
- › What do the seasons of Advent and Christmas teach you about the Christian's path of joy?

WEEK 2

LOVE

READ [JOHN 15:9](#)

Life-changing love

By Elisabeth Rickard, World Vision U.S. staff writer

The love of the Father shown to the world through Jesus' birth has life-changing implications, if we humble ourselves to see them. Notice Jesus' words to His disciples in John 15:9—"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." And how did the Father love the Son? By sending Him as a sacrificial servant to redeem His people. To remain in Jesus' love, then, is to open ourselves to sacrifice, to see the needs of others as more important than our own—and to follow our servant-king where He leads us.

This kind of love runs counter to our own desires though, which tell us to prioritize ourselves and our needs. In the miracle and mystery of the incarnation—and Jesus' whole life, death, and resurrection—His self-giving love offers us a new way of love, one that's rooted in gift and generosity, in sacrifice and servanthood.

One mother in rural Kenya showed this kind of sacrificial love to her daughter, despite high costs. Twelve-year-old Wavinya's name means "powerful." People might think that's an unusual choice for a child born with her lower legs twisted so she wasn't able to walk. But Wavinya's mother, Esther, loves her girl dearly. "Because she was given to me by God," Esther says, "[I] want her to have every opportunity."

That meant that for most of Wavinya's life, Esther carried her everywhere—to church, to school, to community meetings. She wanted to make sure her daughter received an education and was included in community activities. As Wavinya grew, her increasing weight caused Esther to suffer chest pains. But Esther refused to endanger her daughter by leaving her home alone, where she was too vulnerable by herself. Esther's husband, Joseph, works as a subsistence farmer, so a wheelchair was financially beyond the family's reach.



Twelve-year-old Wavinya's wheelchair has meant freedom for her and rest for her mother.



But in 2018, Wavinya received a fitted wheelchair from a World Vision project begun by a USAID-funded program. Esther learned about proper maintenance to keep the chair in top condition so she could continue serving her daughter. Wavinya can now get to school, church, and community meetings on her own.

Before the wheelchair, Wavinya felt isolated and neglected. Now, she can play games with her friends without her mom worrying. And chest pains no longer plague Esther, who enjoys better health. With her independence thanks to the wheelchair and her family's love supporting her, Wavinya has the chance to live into her powerful potential.

Esther didn't have to serve Wavinya so sacrificially. She could have prioritized her own health and needs above her daughter's. But with Jesus' radical love at the center of their family, neglecting her child wasn't an option. We can see examples like this, of God's people quietly living out His commands to love, all around us—when we look.

Jesus didn't have to serve His people so sacrificially, either. He was the king and creator of the universe! But His humble, self-giving act of love, begun in His lowly birth, has forever transformed the way we love others.

Laura Reinhardt of World Vision's U.S. staff gathered Wavinya's story.

REFLECT

- › What are specific ways that Jesus' love has transformed your life personally? Your family's life?
- › What does remaining in the love of Jesus, even through difficulty or hardship, mean to you?
- › How does the Christmas story offer us a surprising picture of God's love?

WEEK 3

HOPE

READ [ROMANS 15:12-13](#)

In Romans 15, Paul quotes a passage from Isaiah calling the promised Messiah “the Root of Jesse” (v. 12). But that promised One didn’t appear for centuries after King David’s time, surely causing many of God’s people to wonder when, if ever, they would see fruit from that branch. When Paul wrote that the Root of Jesse had at last sprung up as Jesus the King, he encouraged his readers to “overflow with hope” as “the God of hope” worked in them (v. 13). And we have the same encouragement from the Word this season.

The best time to plant a tree

Adapted from a reflection by Cory Trenda, World Vision senior philanthropy director (retired)

Recently, a donor asked me this question: “With everything happening in the world right now, is hope a ridiculous concept?”

If you think hope is hard to come by, consider those who were humanitarian workers in Afghanistan. You poured yourself out for years to help people in need but, with the country’s change of power, every positive change may be erased.

World Vision’s Emergency Communications Director James East first arrived in Afghanistan in 2002, just after the allied invasion, as a rookie staff member. He said:

“We had just funded a new school for girls where there had been none before. The children were so excited to be there. At the end of the day, they rushed joyfully out of the gates screaming and laughing, and as they did, an old man hit several with a long cane and sternly told them to be quiet. It shocked me, but the girls just ran on laughing and skipping through the streets in their new school uniforms. Many of those girls will now be in their 30s and mothers themselves. They will want the same for their daughters.”

I pray that of those seeds planted 20 years ago and every year since, many will still bear fruit.

It’s true what a Chinese proverb says: *The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The next best time is today.*

In Ethiopia, I had a similar experience when I returned two decades later to a feeding camp that I had visited when the country



An Afghan mother holds her young child.

was beginning to recover from the devastating famine of 1984–85. Among the early rebuilding efforts we were making, a small school had been constructed for the children who had survived the famine.

Twenty years later, there were now two schools, the second much larger and more modern. As we walked down the street, both the primary and the secondary schools were being dismissed. We suddenly became engulfed in a sea of hundreds of smiling, curious children and adolescents, all dressed in their colorful uniforms. I wanted to ask them about their lives since the famine, but then I realized that none of them were even alive back then . . . instead, these were the sons and daughters of those children we had helped! Those were the seeds of survival planted 20 years earlier, and the fruit was stunning.

My dinner companion who asked “Where can we find hope?” has spent a significant portion of his time, talent, and treasure helping address issues of global inequality. He’s not a skeptic who simply wants to wash his hands of the world and its problems. Yet we all get weary and need a safe place every now and then to ask if it all really makes any difference.

Here’s the key: We find hope in the long arc of God’s faithfulness in history. We recognize the seeds that were planted years and decades ago.

Similarly, in our lives and work, we will always face ups and downs. Yet, by taking the long view of God’s plans for redemption, I am very far from losing hope or forgetting where to find it again. We can also find hope by putting our hand to the plough, as God gives us opportunity.

The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The next best time . . . is today.



Schoolchildren in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia are eager to learn.

REFLECT

- › What does this season of intentional waiting during Christmas teach you about hope?
- › Where are you tempted to lose hope in life? How does Jesus’ birth speak to that despair?
- › What would overflowing with hope look like in your life?

WEEK 4

PEACE



READ [LUKE 1:76-79](#)

A new source of peace

By Elisabeth Rickard, World Vision U.S. staff writer

What makes for true peace in a world full of brokenness and suffering? This passage from Luke 1 grounds our peace in Jesus' incarnation, when God shone light into our darkness once and for all. Through Jesus we have "the knowledge of salvation" and "forgiveness of sins," allowing us to experience "the tender mercy of our God" (vv. 77-79). He "guide[s] our feet into the path of peace" (v. 79) because He has come as Emmanuel, God with us.

In places where poverty's roots run deep, working for peace within a community presents unique challenges. Memory, a 40-year-old mother in rural Zambia, once lived full of despair because she and her husband couldn't break the cycle of poverty that kept them struggling with their land and with each other. They worked hard, but their farming efforts weren't enough to provide for their six children's needs. She agonized when she had nothing to offer her children to eat, and she remembers moments when her children would cry from hunger.

But World Vision's THRIVE (Transforming Household Resilience In Vulnerable Environments) program and Biblical Empowered Worldview curriculum have enabled Memory to change her approach to life, incorporating knowledge and positivity into her work and her relationships. "The benefits were immediate once I adopted conservation agriculture practices and joined a savings group," she says. Being at peace with God's purposes allowed her to flourish in all of life.

In the Biblical Empowered Worldview curriculum, participants like Memory dive deep into identity, vision, compassion, relationships, and faith through a biblical lens. As they learn about what it means to be made in the image of God, they replace fearful and superstitious beliefs about their potential with the knowledge that God loves them, has given them His creativity, and grants them the capacity to transform their lives, families, and communities. They learn how to be productive, take advantage of opportunities, create opportunities for others, and respect and value all people as image-bearers of God—living peacefully even with people who have different values and behaviors. They explore God's vision for individuals, families, and communities to live in harmony, working to provide for their own needs while advocating for policies that uphold people's rights.



Memory, her four children, and her husband gather outside their new home, where they live comfortably.



Thanks to these new mindsets and values, Memory's income and opportunities have skyrocketed. She says the lessons and her experience have made her a strong woman with the determination of always working hard. "I am a free and happy mother," she exclaims.

Our efforts for peace play an integral part in God's already-not-yet kingdom, and though they take many forms around the world, Jesus remains the source of our peace. His merciful, peacemaking life shows us the way to treat not only people living in poverty around the world, but also those close to us who may hurt us. Because our peace comes from the true source, we can work for forgiveness and restoration in even the most broken places.

During the Christmas season, we meditate on the work of our Prince of Peace to remind us of all we've been given in Jesus, and all we're called to give to others because of Him.

Agatha Mali of World Vision's Zambia staff gathered Memory's story.

REFLECT

- > What does it look like to prepare intentionally for peace during the Christmas season?
- > How does following Jesus challenge your ideas of what peace is?
- > How could God be calling you into a new path of peace this season, whether for yourself or the world?

Merry Christmas from World Vision!

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given . . .
—Isaiah 9:6

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World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.

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