



# ADVENT

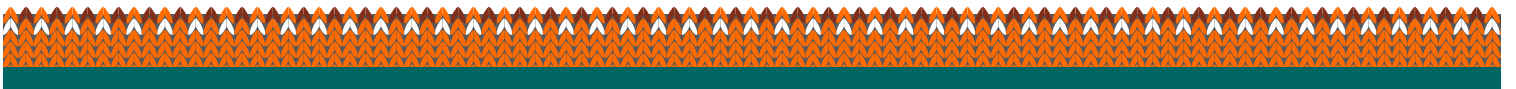
## DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Four weeks of stories and reflections  
to prepare your heart for Christmas



Advent is a unique time to prepare our hearts for the Savior's coming and to reflect on our faith journeys in the four weeks leading up to Christmas. In the intentional waiting, we can center our hearts and minds on truths from God's Word amid the busyness the Christmas season can hold.

In this guide, find four reflections—one from a World Vision donor, the others highlighting God's work in our project areas—created to deepen your Advent experience. Use this devotional on your own or include your family with kid-friendly activities.



# 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).

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.



Yamaranguila, Honduras

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 has your path taken through life? How has it led you to joy in God?
- › What does the season of Advent teach you about the Christian’s path of joy?



# For kids

## THINK



What do you think the difference is between happiness and joy? Talk about it with your family.

## PRAY



Find a Bible verse that talks about joy and share it with someone who may be sad this season. Ask how you can be praying for them.

## DO



**Watch this video** to learn how to make your own mini water pump!



**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.

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.



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



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?



## For kids

### THINK



What's one thing you could do this Christmas to show love like Jesus to the people around you, especially to those who may be in need?

### PRAY



Pray for each member of your family, asking Jesus to bless them and give you creative ways to love them this Christmas season.

### DO



Writing down your prayers is a great way to grow in your relationship with Jesus! **Make a journal** to share your thanks, thoughts, and worries with God—and discover His faithfulness at work in your life.

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, the root had at last borne its fruit in Jesus, leading Paul to encourage 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

by Cory Trendera, World Vision U.S. senior philanthropy director

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 being a humanitarian worker in Afghanistan right now. You’ve poured yourself out for years to help people in need, and now the country’s change of power threatens to wipe out all the gains that have been made.

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.”

Of those seeds planted 20 years ago and every year since, many will surely bear fruit. The energetic voices from inside and outside the country calling for equal rights and protections are encouraging signs that this is not the same place it was 20 years ago.

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 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.



*An Afghan mother holds her young child.*

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 life 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.



Schoolchildren in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia are eager to learn.

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.

I recounted what has happened over the past 40 to 50 years—how extreme poverty has dropped from half the global population to under 10% for the first time in human history and how the number of children dying needlessly every day has dropped by *two thirds* since 1981. Many other statistics tell the same story of stunning overarching success despite some terrible setbacks along the way.

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. Today, the area of Ethiopia that I visited has gone from a hunger hotspot to a food-exporting breadbasket of the country. And those schoolgirls given the opportunity to learn in Afghanistan 20 years ago will not easily allow their own daughters to be denied similar opportunities.

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.

## REFLECT

- What does the season of intentional waiting during Advent 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?



## For kids

### THINK



What’s something you hoped for recently? Did you talk to God about it?

### PRAY



Ask God to fill children around the world with His hope. Pray for specific countries using this [map word search!](#)

### DO



Try drawing what you think hope looks like, then talk with your family about why you drew what you did.

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 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 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, peace-making 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 Advent, 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 Advent?
- 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?



# For kids

## THINK



What's your favorite Christmas carol? If you wrote a song about Jesus's peace-bringing birth, what would it say? Jot down some ideas or try writing a whole song!



## PRAY



Ask God to bring peace in places around the world where people face difficulties. [Read this article](#) with your family for specific ways to pray for spots around the world in conflict.

## DO



"Play" it forward! Check out this list of [10 family activities](#) that will help you learn more about children in need around the world while having fun.

# 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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