

World Vision

LIVING  
MATTHEW 25



**Family and  
Small Group Resource**

## Welcome

In Matthew 25, Jesus calls us to care for “the least of these”—*the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and unclothed, the sick and imprisoned.*

This resource was designed to help your family or small group explore how we can respond to Jesus’ call to care for “the least of these” in your everyday life. Over the next six weeks, you will step into the stories of some of the world’s most vulnerable children and families. Each week’s story of hope includes a powerful transformation that reflects Jesus’ call in Matthew 25. Together, we will look at how Jesus responded to brokenness in the Gospels, and how He seeks to respond to the brokenness in our lives, our communities, and our world today.

Each week, you will be invited to respond to the story through:

- **experiences** to better empathize with the world’s brokenness
- **prayer points** to seek God’s heart
- **action ideas** to respond both locally and globally

This resource was designed with the beginning of each new week falling on Sunday, but can be used anytime throughout the week. Consider choosing a specific day of the week for your family or small group to meet and read the week’s story, pray, and participate in the experience.

***Thank you for joining us as we respond to Jesus’ call for our world.***



## Introduction: The Greatest Commandment

Jesus demonstrated His vision and love for the world by caring for the least of these wherever He went. His vision for the church is just as transformative and breathtaking. Jesus called His disciples to go into all the nations as redeemers, reformers and reconcilers—demonstrating the love of God for humankind in tangible ways, bringing the good news of the Jesus' teachings to those who had never heard it.

*How then are we to respond to the needs in today's world?*

### Six Weeks

We invite you to draw near to God's heart on a transformative journey. Over the next six weeks, we will step into the stories of some of the world's most vulnerable children and families. Each story includes a powerful transformation that reflects Jesus' call in Matthew 25 to care for "the least of these"—*the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and unclothed, the sick and prisoner*. We will look at how Jesus responded to brokenness in the Gospels, and how He seeks to respond to the brokenness in our lives, our communities, and our world today.

Each week, you will be invited to respond to the story through an experience to better identify with the world's brokenness, prayer points to seek God's heart, and action ideas to respond globally and locally through your giving or service. We hope you will experience this journey in community, with your family or friends or in small groups within your church. If you already sponsor a child through World Vision or another organization, we invite you to remember and pray for this child throughout the journey. If you don't, you can learn more about child sponsorship: [www.worldvision.org/sponsor-a-child](http://www.worldvision.org/sponsor-a-child)

### Reflect

Throughout this journey, we will look at different teachings of Jesus where He speaks to the role we should play in the world as followers of Christ. Each week's story reflects a theme and global issue from Matthew 25:34-40, while also looking at a teaching or action of Jesus in the Gospels. Our journey starts by reflecting on the Greatest Commandment in Matthew 22:34-40 and ends with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20.

*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and*

***"For I was hungry  
and you gave me  
something to eat,***

***I was thirsty and you  
gave me something  
to drink,***

***I was a stranger and  
you invited me in,***

***I needed clothes and  
you clothed me,***

***I was sick and you  
looked after me,***

***I was in prison and  
you came to visit me."***

**Matthew 25:35-36  
(NIV)**

*you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

*"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*

*"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25:34-40*

*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*

*Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'*

*This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*

*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:34-40*

The Great Commandment envisions that we, as Jesus' followers would demonstrate in tangible ways God's unconditional love for all people. Jesus expands on this heartfelt call in Matthew 25, when he calls us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, welcome the stranger. Through these actions we are in fact showing God our love for Him in the most personal way.

These days it's easier to turn off the TV or news alerts than it is to face the widespread human suffering currently happening in our world. The wars are too great, the suffering too deep, and we are tempted to retreat inside the walls of our own homes and churches where things are more comfortable, instead of embrace the pain in the world. But God does not want us to take that option—this world is the same world for which Christ died and rose to life. He invites us to see and love the world the way He does and then move that love into action.

## Experience

In your group, read the passages in Matthew 22 and Matthew 25 again. As you do so, discuss your initial thoughts to Jesus' commands and vision for our lives, and any personal challenges that lay in the way of loving as Jesus loved.

Now, take this one step further. Reflecting on your discussion to the questions above, take a moment to write a letter to yourself, or if you prefer, draw a picture. Imagine how the next six weeks might better shape your everyday life. What are things you hope might be different at the end of your journey?

## Pray

Set aside some time today to pray over the coming weeks.

- Thank God for the opportunity to heal areas of brokenness in your own life as you remember the Good News of Jesus and the Kingdom of God.
- As you think about Jesus' call in Matthew 25 to care for "the least of these", bring the needs of the world before God. Pray for those who lack the bare necessities of life and those who suffer injustice. Ask God to open your heart to these issues over the next six weeks.
- Ask that this time would be a space of spiritual and practical renewal for you and your family or small group.



Name:  
**Naomi**

Country:  
**Kenya**

***“I was thirsty  
and you gave me  
something to drink...”***



This week as we journey with those who are thirsty, we invite you to go with a mother on her walk to find clean water in Kenya...

Your name is Naomi and you're 24-years-old. You are a mother, a sister and a wife. You wake to the chattering of birds outside your home—dawn is just beginning to break. You look over to your three young children and wonder what they're dreaming about. They're the most precious things in the world to you, and you would do anything for them.

As a Maasai woman, you carry many responsibilities. Your people and your traditions are centuries old. You value your connection to the land and your ability to work together to protect and teach the next generation. But you are not looking forward to teaching your daughters the journey to get water. The closest source of water is 3 kilometers away—about a 35 minute walk each way, but it feels much farther. Women and children are the bearers of this burden, and the walk can be dangerous with the risk of being attacked by people or wild animals while walking alone. If you don't get there early enough, you have to wait a few hours for your turn. Many of the girls can't go to school because their days are spent making this trip for water.

As you make your journey, you feel the earth beneath your feet and try to go quickly so your children are not left behind for very long. You weave your way down the ravine to scoop up water with your jerry can. You lift the can, weighing about 20 kilograms, onto your back so that the strap rests on your forehead as you hunch forward. There are some women who have slipped on their way down or on their way up and drowned in the deep pool, so you grit your teeth and carefully make your way back up. You try not to think about the pain in your shoulders, neck and back while walking in the hot morning sun. Instead, thoughts of ongoing problems at home come to mind—spending time getting water makes it challenging to do things at home or with your family. You feel weighed down by the water on your back and your worries that your children won't have a good future or be able to go to school. They've been getting sick so often these days, and you think it's from the dirty water you're bringing home, but there are no other options.

Every day you cry out to God for help, a cry for yourself, your children and your family.



When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:7-14

When Jesus speaks with the Samaritan woman at the well, He shows compassion and responds to her physical and spiritual needs. Let’s see how God provides living-water to Naomi and her family.



One day, your village receives the gift of a well, storage tank, pipelines and water kiosk, all within metres of your home. When you first saw the water being pumped out of the ground, your heart sang with happiness and your family celebrated the gift of water and life together. The life-giving water that sprang from the ground transforms your community.

The blessings of God trickle through your family, as your children are no longer getting sick, and they can dream of futures full of life and potential. Getting the water your family needs takes minutes instead of the hours you used to spend walking back and forth each day. The extra time makes it easier to care for your children, do things around the house and spend time with your family. Now, you know that when your children are older, you won’t have to worry about them having to go get water or their safety along the way. The well reached 2,000 people in your community, but the blessings that rippled into your family and their future through God’s grace are countless.



Naomi washes her hands in clean water straight from the tap. This community well serves around 2,000 people and four schools with clean water.

## Reflect

Jesus often did surprising things. We can almost hear the surprise in the voice of the Samaritan woman when Jesus spoke to her, for a Jewish man was not supposed to have any interaction with a Samaritan, especially a woman. And yet Jesus talks with her—and what a conversation it turns out to be!

It begins with a simple request for a drink of water in the heat of the midday sun, but it proceeds into deep spiritual waters. Jesus tells the woman that—as important as physical water is to life—it can only quench thirst for a while. In contrast, Jesus says, there is the “living water” (v10) which he offers, which “gushes up to eternal life” (v14). This water is a gift from God (v10) who is spirit (v24) and who seeks us out (v23). Like Jesus, our nourishment should be to do the will of God (v34), which includes telling others about Jesus just as the Samaritan woman did (v28, 29 and v39), and giving the thirsty something to drink (Matt. 25:35).

For the woman then, as for Naomi now—and for all of us—we need both physical and spiritual water to live life to the fullest (see John 10:10), which is what God intends for all people.

It is no surprise that water, so essential to all life on earth, takes on a symbolic, even sacred, significance, seen most

clearly in baptism. Being baptized is both a sign of our commitment to Christ, but also of His commitment to us. The Samaritan woman discovered this and told her neighbors about Jesus.

Jesus, by crossing the social boundaries of ethnicity and gender, spoke to the woman as an equal. Through this encounter he showed her that her deepest personal and spiritual needs could only be met by God's Spirit.

The same holds true today.

Over two billion people don't have access to safe drinking water at their homes. For millions, this means walking long distances to get water. The task most often becomes the responsibility of women and girls, and they spend up to six hours of their day fetching water. This means that girls don't have the same opportunities to go to school as boys. Not only does this put girls at a disadvantage for their future, but in many places, the walk itself can be dangerous, making them vulnerable to violence or harassment.

Having access to safe, clean water close to home liberates women and children from a life spent gathering dirty water. It restores health and opens the door to education, a promising future and a full life—the kind of life God intends. After journeying with Naomi and her family, here are some initial questions to think about in your own community.

- In what ways did you relate with Naomi's story and what aspects of her life resembles yours?
- How has Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, impacted your personal response to those who are thirsty?
- How should the Church respond to those who are thirsty around the world?

## Pray

This week pray for mothers like Naomi and families who don't have access to clean water.

- Ask God to protect the women and children from violence and harm as they walk long distances to get water.
- Pray for children who aren't able to go to school because of their responsibility to get water, and are suffering from water-related illnesses.
- Pray that everyone in the world would have access to clean water, and come to know Jesus as the source of living water.

## Experience

Continue to walk in Naomi's story throughout your daily actions this week. Think about the necessity of water in your life when you wash your hands, take a drink of water, or use the bathroom. Note how often you rely on water.

**Over the course of this week, make a commitment to drink only water, omitting sugary drinks, coffee, milk, or tea. Use the money you would have spent on other drinks to donate towards giving others access to clean water.**

Towards the end of the week, reflect on these questions and discuss them with your family, small group or a friend:

- On average, how much water did you use each day? Are you surprised by the amount you use/consume?
- What's the furthest you had to go to get clean water this week? How would your life be changed if that distance was significantly further?
- What personal commitments have you made to be more aware of the many children, women, and families in our world who do not have clean water?

## **Other Ways to Take Action**

Below are more ideas for how you can respond to this story.

Local: Look for ways to respond to the 'woman at the well' in your own community. How can you respond with the gift of living water?

Global: Provide access to clean water for those who are thirsty by donating to World Vision's [clean water projects](#).



Name:  
**Reward**

Country:  
**Zambia**

**“For I was hungry  
and you gave me  
something to eat...”**



This week as we journey with those who are hungry, we invite you to a rural village in Zambia, where a small boy is sleeping...

You are five years old, your name is Reward. You wake up to the noise of your sister snoring next to you. You were dreaming of a hot plate of nshima, a porridge-like dish, and flavorful beans but you know it was only a dream and in reality, that dizzy, sick feeling in your stomach will soon set in again.

It wasn't always this way, you had a mother and father once, until one day they were gone and now your grandparents are the ones looking after you. They try their best to take care of you, your sister and four cousins who are also orphans. You love to run around and play with the other kids in your village, but these days you just don't have the strength to jump and skip, instead you sit down and draw in the dust with your finger. Some days you feel too sick to go to school and have a hard time focusing in class. You don't really understand why you feel so tired all the time, but you think it has something to do with the sharp pain in your belly.

Your grandparents notice you and your cousins sitting down instead of playing, so they travel into the bush where the wild animals live. While they're gone, you and your younger cousins are afraid because you've heard stories of bad people coming to harm little children. When your grandparents return, they have thick roots to fill your stomach with, but instead of being full, the roots just end up giving you more stomach pains.

You understand that your grandparents are also suffering from these stomach pains and can't work in the fields like other parents who have cows and other animals. It makes you sad to think that your whole family is hurting and that there is nothing you can do to help.



*When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.*

*Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”*



Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten." John 6:5-14

Jesus sees that people are hungry and does not turn them away, instead he transforms a small offering into an awe-inspiring ripple of blessing. Let's discover how Jesus does this in Reward's life.



One day, a family in the community brings your family goats through a World Vision initiative to help families called 'Pass On'. You learn that through this project, once your goats have babies, you get to pass on the blessing by giving a goat to other families in the village. That very day you get to drink goat's milk and your eyes light up with joy.

From that day on, each day brings a new surprise and a new blessing. Now you have energy to play with your friends and focus at school. The milk from your goat is so delicious, other people want to buy it and drink it also! Your grandparents eventually save up enough money from selling goat milk to buy other food and crops they can plant in the field. You never realized one goat could do so much, but soon that goat turns into two, and three, and your family then gives a goat to a nearby neighbor who was hurting like you once were.

The best part of this story is that you, your sister and cousins finally get to go to school and play. You get to learn the answer to all of the questions that you once were too hungry to even think about. Like what makes the trees grow and where does the rain come from? There is no stopping your curiosity. You learn that a single gift from God can multiply beyond your imagination.



The goats that Reward's family received through the 'Pass On' initiative in Moyo, Zambia provide milk and income.

## Reflect

The people were hungry. They had seen the healing miracle Jesus was performing among sick people and so they kept following him. They were hungry to see more of these miracles. But, of course, following Jesus in the rugged, hot hills was physically demanding, so their stomachs rumbled for food too. Jesus saw them coming and decided to meet both their spiritual and physical hunger, and to use the occasion as an object lesson for his disciples.

Jesus, therefore, gave his disciples a problem-solving opportunity. Philip could not work out how to buy sufficient bread. Andrew fared little better. He introduced a boy to Jesus—a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. "But what are they among so many?" Andrew asked.

Jesus showed him! He had the disciples settle the people into groups. He then took the very limited resources the boy gave him and gave thanks to God for the food. The disciples shared it out. And kept on sharing it out. John tells us that from these very modest beginnings, through prayer, everyone ate "as much as they wanted" so that the whole crowd was "satisfied" (vv11, 12).

Yet there is more to the story: Jesus asked his disciples to "gather up the fragments left over so that nothing may be lost" (v12). There were twelve baskets full. Twelve! The basic events in the story are remarkably simple:

Andrew introduces the boy to Jesus, the boy offers to Jesus his modest resources, Jesus takes these and thanks God for them, and **God multiplies the resources**. It is from such small and modest beginnings that the Kingdom of God grows and flourishes.

Hunger and malnutrition are two of the greatest manifestations of poverty. When families cannot afford nutritious food, it feeds a vicious cycle: parents become less able to earn a living to provide for their family, and children become less able to learn and succeed in school. In many situations, children drop out of school in order to help support their family and become vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Sadly, hunger is still a daily reality for 815 million people—nearly 1 in every 9 people on the planet. And yet, as a world, we already produce enough food to feed everyone.

In Reward's story, we see a struggling community in Zambia who is sharing its resources in order to meet each other's needs. Reward's family benefited from the faithful gift of another family, who helped donate extra goats. As those goats multiply, Reward's family will 'pass on' offspring to others struggling in their community. Together, they are sharing and multiplying the gifts God has blessed them with.

- How can you relate to Reward's story? How have you seen God multiply the gifts of others or of yourself?
- What are your 'loaves and fish'? How might God multiply your gifts to bless others in your community?
- How do you think God's people should respond to issues of hunger and malnutrition? How can you be a part of these solutions?

## Experience

Continue to walk in Reward's story throughout your daily actions this week. As you sit down to eat, take a moment to think about the blessing of food and how your day is impacted by the availability of nutritious food.

**Fast a meal during the week or try eating a simple meal, like rice and beans. Use that time to meditate on the experience of hunger and pray for the millions of children who face hunger as a daily reality.**

Towards the end of the week, reflect on these questions and discuss them with your family, small group or a friend:

- How has fasting and your prayers for children facing hunger challenged your day-to-day experience?
- How has walking with Reward's story inspired you to make changes in your everyday walk or caused you to have a different perspective on hunger?

## **Other Ways to Take Action**

Below are more ideas for how you can respond to this story.

Local: Donate to a local food bank—many are available through churches and supermarkets across the UK.

Global: Provide for a family facing hunger by [giving a goat](#) through World Vision.

## Pray

This week, pray for children like Reward who are facing hunger and malnutrition.

- Ask God for families to receive what they need to grow their own food or have the money to buy it.
- Pray all children would have enough nutritious food for their bodies to grow healthy and strong, and their minds to be focused so they can learn in school.
- Pray for churches, organizations and communities that help hungry families get the food they need.



Name:  
**Josephine**

Country:  
**Uganda**

**“I was sick and you  
looked after me...”**

World Vision 

This week, as we journey with those who face sickness, we invite you to a village in Uganda, during the rainy season...

As the rain pours outside you feel drops of water fall on your head - there is a leak in the roof again. You are a 63-year-old woman named Josephine. Life has brought many challenges for you, with the stress causing aches and pains in your body. Three of your daughters died from HIV and AIDS. Now their children live with you, making that fourteen people sleeping under your small roof and fourteen mouths to feed, including your own. With both diabetes and high blood pressure, your health isn't well enough for you to work to provide for everyone. You have to get by as best you can without taking medicine, because the family can't afford the extra cost. That means you often are in pain, dizzy and tired.

Malaria is also a problem for your family. Everyone tries to sleep under mosquito nets, but it doesn't always help. You, your children and grandchildren often deal with the high fevers and fatigue that comes with malaria. Since you can't afford to buy the pills that help your grandchildren recover from malaria, you and one of your daughters often gather medicinal herbs from around the house. You soak the herbs in water, squeeze out the juice and have the children drink it, hoping it will reduce their fevers and pains.

There is still stigma around HIV, and since your daughters died of the disease, you and your children worry about not being accepted by the community. Often, you feel alone and worried about not being able to care for your family.



*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”*

*He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

*“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”*

*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”*

*In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped*

him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:25-37

Through the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows us what it means to be a neighbor and how to care for others. Let's see how God used Josephine's church and neighbors to help change her life.



Arthur, the pastor of the local church, reached out to you. He says the church saw your need and wants to help you and your family. Pastor Arthur had recently joined Channels of Hope, a program that trains churches to better care for people in their communities who are sick or in need. He learned how to care for the people in the community who were forgotten or ignored. Because of this, Pastor Arthur and the church want to do more to care for families like yours.

The church gives your family a cow, providing milk for your grandchildren to drink, and some piglets to raise and sell. With the community's support, you are starting to feel more hopeful each day and are able to care for your children and grandchildren. Each Sunday, you wake up early to make hundreds of small banana pancakes, which you sell at the church. Everyone loves your delicious pancakes, and each week they buy all of them, providing a small income that your family can spend on food, medicine and other needs.

You love spending Sundays at the church singing, dancing and talking with your neighbors. While you still struggle at times, your family is better off and you have a community



Josephine's delicious banana pancakes are wrapped in fresh banana leaves. Her church continues to support Josephine after worshiping together at Buhimba Christian Fellowship.

to support you. You don't feel so alone anymore and your family feels God's love and protection all around you, through the help of your neighbors.

## Reflect

This story is so well-known we can easily overlook the shocking power it contains. In the context in which Jesus was speaking it would have been quite offensive, almost insulting even, for Samaritans were an excluded group, hated by the Jews. A modern re-telling of the story might include an Orthodox Jew being robbed and the Samaritan being replaced by a Palestinian—it is radical storytelling indeed! It is about crossing barriers of race, religion and culture, to see all people as our neighbors (even our enemies). The Samaritan crossed the road—and the barriers—to show the utmost care, making sure the injured man was safe and recovering well.

The story begins with an exchange between Jesus and "an expert in the law." He is doing two things: he is trying to test Jesus, and then he seeks to justify himself. The story catches him by surprise—it is not the answer he was expecting. Rather than have a discussion about legal interpretation, Jesus chose to highlight a characteristic of God—mercy—that he wants all His followers to imitate. In this instance it is showing mercy to someone suffering from violence. But the same principle of always being

merciful applies to those who are suffering from any illness of mind or body.

Sickness is something we have all known and felt ourselves. Even when it's just a cold or the flu, our bodies ache, we are tired and it can be difficult to do our everyday tasks. For those who have malaria, HIV, or face other chronic illnesses, imagine how it feels to be sick on a nearly-daily basis. It's an incredible feeling when a family member or friend brings us soup or helps us when we have a cold or the flu. But for many people, their illness may cause them to face stigma or be excluded from their community.

Josephine and her grandchildren were stigmatized, because the children's parents passed away from HIV. From 1990 to 2016, an estimated 16.5 million children worldwide lost one or both parents due to HIV. Children who are orphaned are often seen to be a "burden" to their communities and may face physical and emotional abuse. Pastor Arthur saw that Josephine's family was marginalized in their community and the church cared for their neighbor, crossing boundaries to provide Josephine and her family with additional support.

- How can you relate to Josephine's story? How have you felt isolation in your own life?
- Who in your community faces exclusion? What are some ways you can respond and be a neighbor to those around you?
- How do you think the Church should respond to sick and isolated? What role can you play in caring for and helping others around the world to heal?

## Pray

This week, pray for families like Josephine's who are facing sickness and isolation.

- Ask God to give strength and protection to those who are sick, especially children.
- Pray for the world's most vulnerable people to have access to the medicine and care they need.
- Pray for wisdom and strength for the doctors, nurses and medics working in hospitals and clinics.
- Pray that scientists and researchers find new ways to protect people from illness and cure diseases.

## Experience

Continue to walk in Josephine's story throughout your daily actions this week. Be intentional about noticing when others around you are sick or facing isolation, and find ways to show mercy and kindness in your everyday interactions with people.

**Take some time during your morning or your lunch break to be completely alone—without other people or electronic devices. Use this time in solitude to pray and meditate on God's words for those who may be suffering from sickness or pain in isolation. Write down your reflections during this time.**

Towards the end of the week, reflect on these questions and discuss with your family, small group or a friend:

- How has walking with Josephine's story and spending time in isolation changed your understanding of people who are sick or on the margins of your community?
- How often this week did you notice people who were sick or facing a challenge?

## **Other Ways to Take Action**

Below are more ideas for how you can respond to this story.

Local: Volunteer at a local hospital or senior center. Create cards or write letters for those who are sick.

Global: Care for those who are sick by supporting World Vision's [health programs](#).



Name:  
**Shaima**

Country:  
**Syria**

**“I was a stranger and  
you invited me in...”**



This week, as we journey with the those who are forced to flee their homes, we take you to a dusty road in the countryside of Syria...

Your name is Shaima and you are 12 years old. The afternoon sun beats down on you, making your head fuzzy from the heat. Out here, there is no protection from the sweltering sun. You know the only thing to do is keep walking; returning home isn't a possibility. Your home in Syria used to be a place of community and joy, where you played with your friends. In your town everyone supported each other and it felt safe, until missiles and bombs began raining from the sky. The whistling sound as they fell set panic in your chest. Houses in your town were destroyed, friends were hurt and it was no longer safe to play outside.

Your family tried to live as normally as possible. You and your sister still went to school, but then an explosion happened at the school and you could no longer attend. Many of your neighbors left, heading to Jordan in search of safety and a better life. Your family stayed longer but as life in your town became more and more dangerous, your family finally decided to follow the others. You packed the few things you could carry with you: some clothes, your favorite book, a handful of photographs.

Now you're here, on the harsh, 72-kilometre journey from Syria to Jordan. Often walking through areas that are not safe, your family starts early in the morning and walks all day. The morning is not so bad, but by now, it's afternoon and you're under the scorching sun. Your family brought what water they could, but everyone still feels dehydrated. Especially your sister, who has become weaker along the way. From the extreme heat and lack of water, she suffers from sunstroke. Without any help out here in the desert, your sister passes away.

Your family struggles to keep going, but somehow, you find the strength to continue. You finally make it to Jordan where your family settles at a refugee camp. You've made it to safety - there are no bombs and explosions, but with the loss of your sister, your family has been torn apart and overcome with grief.



*Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will*

*be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

*Luke 14:12-14*

*Jesus invites those who are heavy with burdens and well-acquainted with grief to his banquet and asks us to do likewise. Let's see how God comforts and welcomes Shaima and her family in the midst of deep sorrow.*



At first you are scared of meeting new people in a strange, new place. You feel shy and are unsure if life will ever be the same as it was before. But you don't have to go far to find friends. Families around you have fled the same conflict that you did, and your new neighbors start to visit your family, making you feel welcomed and comforted in this time of hardship. It has been hard to talk with your mother about your sister's death, but slowly, with the support of each other and those around you, your family is beginning to heal.

Soon, you start attending the nearby school. You've missed being in class and are excited to be learning again. You study hard, hoping to become a doctor so that one day you can care for other children suffering from conflict, like you and your sister did.

The school becomes a great place to grow your mind and meet other children like you. Being the new student is challenging at first, but you quickly build friendships with others in your class. Your new friends invite you to join them at an after school program, so every afternoon, as soon as your homework is finished, you run off to meet them at the football pitch. It is here on the pitch, kicking the ball around and having fun with your friends, that you really feel yourself coming alive again. In this place as you and your family rebuild a new community, you are starting to feel comfortable and safe again.

You're not sure what the future holds, but playing football and learning new things in school has given you hope that a brighter future is possible.



*Shaima taking down notes at school. Shaima hopes to become a pediatrician one day to help children who are suffering from conflict.*

## **Reflect**

It is not difficult to find stories of hospitality throughout both the Old and New Testaments. There is Abraham who entertained angels unaware (Genesis 18:1-15, and see Heb. 13: 2); Jacob and his family welcomed by Pharaoh (Gen. 47: 5, 6); the feeding of the five thousand in John 6; and the Last Supper, among many other examples.

Food is, of course, an essential part of hospitality, but it is not the most important aspect, which is welcoming others. The core value is the expression of friendship (usually through food and drink) and this becomes more profound as we welcome the stranger. This is a spiritual practice, alongside prayer, worship, reading the Word and mission, and it imitates God. He opened His heart to us, supremely shown in Jesus coming among us to live with and to die for us! Through the resurrection we can share in God's new life. We were once strangers and God welcomed us through Jesus. We should welcome the stranger likewise.

In the short story Jesus told in Luke chapter 14 we see this gift of hospitality at work. The host sends out invitations but is not satisfied with a partially full banquet hall; he wants every place at the table to be filled. He therefore sends invites out to those considered unclean and unworthy. It is a characteristic of Jesus to draw attention to such vulnerable people. He mixed with them, talked with them and celebrated with them! He was even

called 'a friend of sinners and tax collectors!' It should be no surprise that He expects those who are called by His name to do the same.

It is also a characteristic of Jesus to focus on those who are regarded as outsiders, those outside the community of faith. Jesus taught the kingdom was open and welcoming to all people.

This week marks the seventh anniversary of the conflict in Syria. It has been internationally recognized as the largest refugee and displacement crisis of our time. Syrian children and families have witnessed unspeakable violence and bear the brunt of the conflict. Almost 500,000 Syrians have died and nearly 12 million people have been displaced from home. Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, have welcomed the greatest number of refugees, but there is a need for more than just a place of refuge—this crisis needs hope.

Millions of children like Shaima have been forced to flee their homes, leaving behind everything and becoming strangers in a new land. They have lost family members and friends due to the violence of the conflict, suffered physical and psychological trauma, and have had to leave school. Regaining their childhood and a safe space to grow and learn is critical in the healing process of overcoming these painful scars.

After journeying with Shaima and her family as they were welcomed in to a safe space, here are some initial questions to think about in your own community.

- When you arrived with Shaima and her family at the refugee camp in Jordan, what emotions and fears did you have?
- How is Jesus' parable regarding the Great Banquet, reflected in Shaima's journey?
- How have your thoughts about refugees and this crisis changed by entering into Shaima's story?

## Experience

Continue to walk in Shaima's story throughout your daily actions this week.

**Over the course of this week, we invite you to spend a few nights sleeping on the floor to remember the millions of families and children who are fleeing their homes and making long, perilous journeys to safety.**

Towards the end of the week, reflect on these questions and discuss them with your family, small group or a friend.

- How did your experience of sleeping on the ground help you to better connect with Shaima's journey?
- Are there organizations, churches or places in your immediate community that are helping refugees to settle into a new life?
- What are ways that you could help support children like Shaima who have been affected by conflict and violence and forced to flee their homes?

## **Other Ways to Take Action**

Below are more ideas for how you can respond to this story.

Local: Find ways to be involved in welcoming refugees in your own community.

Global: Help welcome refugees by donating to World Vision's [refugee crisis fund](#).

## Pray

This week, pray for children and families like Shaima's who are fleeing from conflict zones and searching for safety.

- Ask God to continue providing life-saving assistance and newfound hope for Syrian refugees.
- Pray the children of Syria do not lose another year to bloodshed and suffering. Pray we don't lose this generation of children.
- Pray people worldwide will respond to this humanitarian crisis.





Name:  
**Latha**

Country:  
**India**

**“I needed clothes and  
you clothed me...”**



This week as we journey with those who are unclothed, we invite you to a home in India, where a young girl gets ready for the day..

Your name is Latha and you are 13 years old. Every morning you wake up earlier than the sun, pull your hair back into braids, and make your way outside to boil water for the morning's breakfast. This used to be your mother's job, but since she got sick and the pain makes it hard for her to move from bed, it now falls on you. You had to drop out of school to work and help care for your two little brothers. As you stir the steaming pot of porridge, three girls come down the road. They look happy in their school uniforms, smiling and waving to you as they pass. You blush and wave back, but feel very plain in your normal clothes. You look down at your feet and sigh, wishing you could join them at school but you know that's out of the question. Instead you wake up your brothers, and they groggily accept the food you made for them. After helping to feed your mom in bed, you run outside the house and down the road to the matchstick factory.

The matchstick factory smells of pine and ash and once inside, you're greeted by other children as they briefly put their heads up to say "Hello" then immediately go back to work for fear of getting in trouble. You find your mat in the corner and lay it out to begin your day's work of finding faulty matchsticks that are too short, and then sort them into little boxes. You have gotten very good at doing it quite quickly, and even made a game for yourself to challenge how fast you can do it. But after a while, the game gets boring so you let your mind wander as your hands do the work. You wonder what your friends were learning in school today. Maybe math, reading, or science? Your favorite subject was science, because you loved asking questions and discovering how the world worked. You wonder if you'll ever be able to put on a school uniform again and go to school with the other children your age.



*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"  
He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*

*"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."  
Matthew 18:1-6*

*Jesus lifts up children as the greatest in His kingdom, and reminds us of our responsibility to clothe them with love and support. Let's see how God transforms Latha and her family's life through the community's support.*



Finally at the end of your shift, you stretch your hands to the sky and feel your back crack into place. As you walk back home, thinking about what you should cook for dinner, you notice an older woman waiting outside of your house. You've never seen this woman before, but as you come closer you see your mum come outside and welcome the woman in. You feel like something big is about to happen.

The woman says she is from World Vision and from a program that helps children who can't afford to go to school. She then pulls out several things from her small bag. The first is a pack of pencils, then several notebooks, and finally a brand new school uniform that looks exactly your size! The woman explains that they want to enroll you back in school and are going to pay for your school fees and provide economic assistance to your parents.

She asks you how you feel about this, but you don't know how to express your joy. You want to jump up and down with happiness, but you are also nervous because you haven't been to school in two years. You worry that maybe you have forgotten everything. Your mum smiles reassuringly and tells you that you can do it. The very next morning, you carefully pull on your new school uniform and make breakfast. When the other girls come walking down the street, you grab your notebooks and pencils and run out to join them.

You learn everything you can, and hungrily eat up every lesson. You can't hide your happiness at home whenever you explain interesting things you learned to your brothers and parents. The gift of a uniform and opportunity to learn has completely transformed your life.



*Latha is bright and eager to learn in grade 12. She is studying to one day become an electrical engineer.*

## **Reflect**

Jesus—once again—teaches some very radical and uncomfortable things, this time about power and status between adults and children. He does this when responding to a question about greatness in God's Kingdom. Jesus' approach is almost always subversive and challenging, forcing His hearers – and us today – to think again about how we see the world, our place in it, and the place of children.

Throughout history, children have often been considered second class citizens or cheap labor. In many parts of the world, the needs of children, whether for clothes and education (in Latha's story) or other basic rights, are still secondary to their parents. Today, there are an estimated 152 million child laborers worldwide with 85 million of these children involved in hazardous work. In addition, over half the world's children, 1.7 billion children, experience some type of violence every year.

So Jesus, in this conversation with His disciples, turned the tables on them. Contrary to seeing children as of less importance than adults—and their needs, as secondary to adult needs—Jesus places a very high value on children! So much so, in fact, that instead of telling the child to become like His disciples, He tells the disciples to 'change' from their preoccupation with greatness, and to 'become like little children.' They are the model to which the disciples should aspire: of low status, usually dependent

upon others and God for their various needs, and in a way, representative of Jesus himself. Welcoming a child in Jesus' name is equivalent to welcoming Jesus.

Thus, we are to be extremely diligent in how we engage with children and their needs, treating them with the same care and attention with which we would treat Jesus himself. It follows, as Jesus makes explicitly clear, that we should take extreme measures to ensure the well-being of children, and to avoid at all costs causing them to stumble, for the penalties of causing one child to stumble are terrible. But the rewards of meeting their needs—they are out of this world!

While the statistics are staggering, Jesus calls us to protect children and prioritize their needs. In Latha's story, the community comes around her and her family through World Vision, clothing her with education so her days can be focused on the future. It's an investment that changes the course of her life forever but also contributes to a change in her community—emphasizing that children are to be cherished, protected and empowered.

As you are journeying with Latha this week, here are some questions to think about.

- Why do you think Jesus calls us to become like children?
- How have you seen God work through others to change your life for the better?
- What are some ways you, your family or church community can help children whose needs are being neglected in your community or around the world?

## Pray

This week, pray for children like Latha who are out of school or trapped in child labour.

- Pray all children and families have the basics they need: clothes, food, education and healthcare.
- Pray children are protected from child labor and threatening situations, and that those around them would see how precious they really are.
- Pray all children have the opportunity to attend school and obtain the knowledge and skills they need to get good jobs and leave poverty behind.

## Experience

Continue to walk in Latha's story throughout your daily actions this week.

**This week we invite you to try wearing the same clothes more than one day in a row and as you do so, lift up prayers for the millions of children hoping to go to school one day wearing their own school uniform.**

Towards the end of the week, reflect on these questions and discuss them with your family, small group or a friend:

- How has living a more minimized lifestyle enabled you to be more responsive and aware to the millions of children currently in child labor and out of school?
- What commitments can you make in your everyday wardrobe that would encourage you to continue to cultivate a heart of compassion and advocacy?

## **Other Ways to Take Action**

Below are more ideas for how you can respond to this story.

Local: Downsize your wardrobe and donate your second hand clothing to local organizations that distribute to those in need.

Global: Through World Vision's education programs, you can [provide school supplies](#) to children in need.



Name:  
**Joel**

Country:  
**Peru**

**“I was in prison  
and you came to  
visit me...”**

World Vision

This week, as we walk alongside children who face slavery or forced labor, join us in a busy street market in Peru...

You are a young boy named Joel. You feel the hustle and bustle of everyone walking past you. It's an exciting place—lots of bright colors, fantastic smells and delicious looking food. While you want to wander around and explore, you can't. You are here to work, using all of your strength to lug a trolley larger than yourself and carry packages for other customers. Hopefully you will make enough to buy food to fill your family's hungry stomachs.

Your father left before you can remember, so from the age of 3, you've had to find ways to support yourself and your family. Because you need to work, you don't get to play with the other children and often have to miss school.

At the age of five, you are sent away to work in the fields with your uncles. Working here is much harder than the market. You're under the sun all day, working your body to the point of breaking. You feel imprisoned, not free to be a kid and have fun.

At night, you just want to rest, but often you find your relatives taking their anger out on you—yelling and even hitting you. As you lay in bed trying to fall asleep, you find yourself feeling sad, missing your mother and family back home. You feel so alone and trapped here and wonder if things will ever get better.



*He [Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*  
Luke 4:16-19

Around the world, there are 152 million child laborers like Joel. Jesus says that he came to set the oppressed free and bring freedom for the prisoners. Let's see how God continued to work in Joel's story.



After a year of working hard in the fields, your mother sends for you to come home. You never thought it would happen, but you finally get to see your mum and you feel safe again. Your mum tells you she has registered you to be a 'sponsored child'. You're not entirely sure what that means but, because of the support your family receives through World Vision, you're able to stop working and focus on school. Soon you begin receiving letters from your sponsor. You are so excited to be getting letters from far away and you create drawings to send back to your sponsor.

Years pass and you graduate high school, fueled by a passion to transform your emotions, pain and dreams into art. As you enter art school, you are given your first set of oil paints and you remember your journey from a small child to now. So much has changed, but your gratitude to your family and sponsor family, and excitement to create art has not faded. You begin using your talent to bring awareness to the issue of child labor. Your art advocates for children's rights and gives a voice to the thousands of working children in Peru.

## Reflect

Jesus went to His hometown. His public ministry had begun after His baptism and the temptations in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). His fame had started to spread as a result of His teaching (4:14,15). He was getting a great reception. It was then that Jesus went home to Nazareth, a deeply religious town in the hills high above Lake Galilee.

Jesus chose a reading from Isaiah the Prophet (Isaiah 61). Jesus was 'filled with the power of the Spirit' (Luke 4:14), and used the text from Isaiah as a way of explaining His ministry. He told listeners, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (4:21). In other words, I am the fulfillment!

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus put these words in practice. He spent time with the poor and oppressed. He told them about the Good News of God's kingdom and



*Joel displays some of his favorite works of art in his room at the Fine Arts School of Ayacucho. Joel aspires to equip the next generation of children with newfound creativity and confidence.*

how they could be part of it. He healed people, cast out demons and fed people. He taught about a different way of living based on trust in God, life in which we can be (in the words of an old hymn) 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven!'

In today's day and age, it's hard to believe that slavery still exists. But around the world, people are still imprisoned in modern-day slavery. Where poverty is widespread, children are especially at risk of being forced into labor, having to work to feed themselves or their families. 85 million children are enslaved and millions more work. No child should be forced to work and risk their own safety and health.

Joel's story is just one example of how the Christian community around the world can engage with the poor and oppressed. As Christians, we are invited to step into God's freedom and work towards creating a world where the oppressed are set free. Jesus enters our lives to not just transform us but to also be a vehicle through which He might transform others. Joel did not have an easy childhood, but God used others to set him free. Now Joel is using his new life to be a voice for others through the gifts God gave him.

Reflect on these questions:

- How can you relate to Joel's story? What does the word 'freedom' mean to you and how have you experienced it in your own life?
- Who is imprisoned in your community? What are some ways for you to respond where you are?
- How do you think the Church should respond to modern-day slavery and those imprisoned? What role can you play in creating freedom for others around the world?

## Pray

Pray for children like Joel who are working or have been forced to work.

- Ask for God to give strength, protection and freedom to children who are currently enslaved and forced to work
- Pray that those in power—government, policy makers, other authorities—learn how harmful child labor is and work towards making a world where all children are free.
- Pray churches, organizations & communities respond to the prevention of child labor, helping to restore the lives of those affected by it.

## Experience

Continue to walk in Joel's story throughout your daily actions this week. As you work or do chores around the house, think about what it would be like to be a child who is forced to work and not free to really be a kid.

**Tie a piece of twine or string around your wrist. When you notice it throughout the day, use that moment to think about and pray for the millions of children stuck in slavery and labor.**

Towards the end of the week, reflect on these questions and discuss them with your family, small group or a friend.:

- As you went throughout the week, how often did the string around your wrist catch your attention and make you stop to think about Joel's story?
- How has walking with Joel's story changed your understanding of child laborers and those imprisoned?

## **Other Ways to Take Action**

Below are more ideas for how you can respond to this story.

Local: Befriend someone who is alone in your community.

Global: Write a letter to your sponsored child, encouraging them in their studies and dreams for the future. If you don't already sponsor a child, you can [learn more about sponsorship](#) through World Vision and consider becoming a sponsor.

## Conclusion: Called into the World

*Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:16-20*

Through the past six weeks, we've journeyed to homes around the world where amazing transformation and joy has transpired. We've seen communities receive clean drinking water for the first time, hungry families provided a source of income and livelihood, churches ministering to the sick, countries opening up their homes to the refugee, girls given the opportunity to learn and go to school, and children taken out of bondage to enjoy life in all its fullness.

It's clear from these testimonies that Jesus' command to take His message of God's love for all people, is only possible through the transformative love shown through His church and His people. When people see and feel the love of Christ through our deeds, it prepares the world to hear the message of Christ through our words.

For some this means spending a little less on coffee or tea each week and donating to those who are without clean water, giving to your local food bank, visiting a nursing home to give comfort to those who are sick and lonely, welcoming refugees into your city, being conscious of child slavery and unethical work practices, and advocating for all children to be free wherever they live. In whichever ways you respond to "the least of these", we believe that when done with love we can powerfully show God's love to the world.

We hope the past six weeks have ignited your vision of a world where all Christians respond to Jesus' call into the world, and one that you can practice daily.

### Experience

Revisit the letter you wrote in the beginning of this journey and reflect on what you wrote then as well as the experiences you had during the past six weeks. Take some time to write a new letter to yourself.

- What is one of the most impactful readings or actions you experienced?

**"For I was hungry  
and you gave me  
something to eat,**

**I was thirsty and you  
gave me something  
to drink,**

**I was a stranger and  
you invited me in,**

**I needed clothes and  
you clothed me,**

**I was sick and you  
looked after me,**

**I was in prison and  
you came to visit me."**

**Matthew 25:35-36  
(NIV)**

- How has this journey changed you, your family or your small group?
- Looking forward, how do you feel God is calling you to continue caring for “the least of these” in your own community and around the world?

## Pray

Set aside some time today and this week to pray:

- Thank God for the testimonies that were shared on this journey and the ones that will continue to be shared in the future.
- Give thanks for this season of renewal and how God has worked in your life over the past six weeks.
- Pray for those around the world in need — the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and unclothed, the sick and imprisoned. Ask God how you can continue to care for “the least of these” in your daily life.



**Thank you for joining us  
on this journey!**

**We hope your church and community  
have been blessed through this experience.  
Continue living out Jesus' call in Matthew 25  
by seeing how you can get involved in World  
Vision's work around the world!**

**Learn more at [worldvision.org](http://worldvision.org)**

---

Designed by: Imani Anderson

Written by: John Baxter-Brown, Avery Parducci,  
Sarah Park, James Pedrick

Photography by: Chris Huber, Ajitson Samuel Justus,  
Eugene Lee, Jon Warren, Alex Whittle



***John Baxter Brown***

John Baxter-Brown, or JBB as he is usually known, works part-time as Senior Advisor in Evangelism for the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance. He lectures and tutors on mission and evangelism and has previously worked as a consultant to the World Council of Churches, World Vision International and Compassion International. He has edited and authored numerous books, journals and articles. JBB is married with two teenage daughters and two dogs, currently living in Wiltshire, United Kingdom.



*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.*

World Vision 

LIVING  
MATTHEW 25



[www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org)