

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



JOINING TOGETHER TO HELP LIGHT THE WORLD.

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This Christmas the **Evangelical Environmental Network** and **New Vision Renewable Energy** are partnering together to bring solar lights to families in Malawi and Honduras through our local church-based partners. This is community based development at its best and the start of a long term process to transform the lives of rural villages in Malawi and Honduras.

Many families own just one simple light (like the one in the picture). They spend between \$7-12 on batteries multiple times a year. When they don't use lights they use wood burning fires or kerosene lamps. Indoor air pollution is a leading cause for asthma and respiratory illness in the developing world. Not to mention the number of women who get second and third degree burns from using wood for heating and cooking. The number of women suffering from burns rivals the number that contract HIV in any given year.



While solar light does not eliminate the need for wood in cooking it can be part of a whole range of interventions that drastically reduces a family's need for wood and kerosene. Decentralized locally owned solar light can also spur innovation.

EEN believes these locally owned, church-based community development solutions are the key to bringing hope, life, and a future for many of the poor in remote Malawi and Honduras. Here's some information on **EEN's** local church-based partners.

Eagles Relief and Development (Malawi)

A registered Malawian charity set up by Living Waters Church in 2002 with a vision to free Malawi from hunger and poverty. Eagles brings a self-help approach to overcome despair and improve everyone's lives. Eagles enable villages to grow enough food, look after the vulnerable, and care for the environment. Eagles train churches to help their communities identify their problems and come up with solutions.

MOPAWI (Honduras)

MOPAWI works in a region that is 20 percent of Honduras' land territory, but only has between 100,000-120,000 people. Many of them are native to the land. MOPAWI works through local churches to bring transformative community development by eliminating incentives for deforestation and promoting sustainable economic development.

**Please join with us this Advent to bring hope,
light, and life to families around the world.**

Christmas Lights Advent Devotional

**Bringing the Light of Christ
to Families Around the World!**



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Introduction

Thousands of miles from home and hundreds of miles from the nearest electric pole, our team was visiting our first village to test the first set of solar-powered lights we had produced for families without electricity. As the sun was setting, we asked a simple question and received the feedback that would lead to this Advent devotional and the development of a plan to help bring lights to families around the world. The question was, “Tell us about an experience in your life where having a light would have made a big difference.” Up until this point our new friends from this village were shy and reserved, but the question was one that struck a common nerve and everyone had a story to tell. They lined up and shared. Some led the group to great laughter, while others were more serious. One woman told of falling in the hole of a pit latrine. One tale was about a harmless puppy sounding like a lion creating fear. The majority, however, were stories embedded with suffering. The more we listened, the more we understood the world God created and the gift good lights are. It did not take long to become an emotional wreck as the stories were told. Each story different. Each solution the same.

By this time in the day, my new friend, Pastor Lucas, had won us over with his smile and deep-seated joy for life. Lucas told of being a boy and wanting a good education. He talked about walking back and forth to school and finishing the family chores just before the sun went down. The cost of kerosene or lamp oil was too much at times for his family, so the cheapest and brightest form of lighting was to cut pieces off discarded tires and set them ablaze. Each piece would give him 20 to 30 minutes of light to study by, while he tried to avoid the smoke blowing back in his face.

I could picture him as a young boy. I thought about how hard it was for him, and I just had to flip a switch. Pastor Lucas finished his talk by saying, “Praise God I graduated with a good education, but now my eyesight is almost gone. The doctors told me it was because I spent too much time too close to the burning rubber. I would probably be able to see better today if I only had a light.”

Finally the sun was about to set. The last mother standing had a story that held great pain. She proceeded to tell of the night she laid her twins down in the bed in their dark hut. There was a black Mamba snake curled up in the corner, and she did not see it until it was too late. Her words, “I would have seen the snake and still have my babies if only I had a light.”

There are almost 1.3 billion people on the planet who live through the night without the benefits of electricity, and another 2.1 billion whose electricity is unreliable. Today, families around the world light the Candle of Hope, marking the beginning of Advent. We pray that the true Light of Christ would fill your heart and home as we begin the journey to understanding the challenges of global energy poverty. Our hope is it will lead all of us to act justly and in some way help provide lights to those living in darkness.

This devotional is a journey we plan to take together each year. Please enjoy the time personally, as a family, or a small group. On behalf of the families and communities that will benefit from our learning and sharing, thank you for helping “Light Up the Night”.

Ruston Seaman
President, New Vision Renewable Energy

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Introduction to Advent

Wonderful Season of Light

"It's the most wonderful time of the year!" Each year at the Moore household, the Advent season begins with this rousing holiday greeting by Andy Williams – hardly a Christmas carol, but certainly expressive of the mood and hope of this glorious season of light.

The appeal of Christmas is universal. Even those who have no faith seem to “step outside themselves” during the Christmas season, leaving whatever of Scrooge characterizes them most of the year and finding a bit of good cheer for just about everyone.

The four-week celebration of Advent has been a fixture in the Christian Church since the fifth and sixth centuries. A calendar of martyrs from 354 AD mentions December 25 as the birth date of Jesus Christ, the earliest known attribution of that date to our Savior's incarnation. The Advent season quickly overtook the old Roman civic celebration of the sun, which was observed at this time of the year, as Christians taught the world to focus from a great but lesser light to the True Light who enlightens every person.

Historically, the Advent season has been a time of celebration, but not of extravagance – a solemn time of preparing new believers for baptism, renewing vows and commitments, rejoicing in the gift of Christ and his kingdom, and looking ahead to the second coming of our Lord. Over the years, Christians from different cultures and denominational traditions have adopted local customs and peculiar delights to their celebration of Jesus' birth. In all cultures, however, lights of various kinds have always featured large in Christmas celebrations, declaring to the world the Church's experience of coming to know the true Light, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Advent is truly a wonderful time of the year, and a glorious season of light. The Light of Jesus has shown into the darkness of a sorrowful, fearful world, and the darkness cannot overcome it, cannot prevent its growing presence and influence (1 John 2:8). How appropriate that, in this wonderful season of light, we are able to bring the warmth and glow of light to people who have never had the luxury of hanging up a string of tree lights or even flicking on a light after dark. Technological advances have now made it possible for us to bring light – and everything that accompanies it, including learning, fellowship, safety, and more – where light after dark has, to date, only been possible through the poisonous burning of kerosene or other fuels.

Jesus is the True Light who lights every person coming into the world (Jn. 1:9). The lights we so love to display at Christmas will have new meaning this year. They will remind us not only of our Lord Jesus and the coming of his Kingdom of Light, but of

the grace of God that allows light to come into the darkness of thousands of homes, homes where such light has never penetrated the darkness before.

May each of those lights come like a flickering John the Baptist wherever they are installed, heralding a new day and bringing a foretaste of the greater Light by whose grace our gifts will illuminate the homes of many.

Advent is the most wonderful time of the year! A wonderful season of light! And this year, more than ever, the Light of Christ's love and presence will shine in new places and in new ways, because we who have come to the Light of the World are determined to share light a dark world for as many people as we can.

Thank you for sharing in this Advent outreach of light – and Light!

Rev. T. M. Moore

Principal, The Fellowship of Ailbe



Introduction to Energy Poverty

Today, some 1.2 billion people, almost one fifth of the world's population, still depend on rudimentary forms of lighting such as kerosene wick lamps and candles to light their homes and workplaces. These energy sources kill and harm many families, especially women and children, due to pneumonia and other respiratory illnesses from toxic smoke, through burns and accidental poisoning.

Children find it hard to study by candlelight, and families cannot work into the evening without adequate affordable lighting and other energy sources needed to help light their homes and power their livelihoods.

This devotional brings together key voices of faith to shed light on the issue, and speaks to the responsibility and opportunity we have to help address this through supporting the effective replacement of these rudimentary light sources with improved lighting – like small scale solar lighting sources – increasingly available and affordable around the world.

At this Advent time, when Christians celebrate the light that Christ has brought into the world, let us also support actions to bring better lighting into the lives of children and their families around the world all year long.

Richenda Van Leeuwen
Executive Director, Energy and Climate, Energy Access
United Nation Foundation
www.energyaccess.org



ENERGY ACCESS
PRACTITIONER NETWORK

First Sunday of Advent

Candle of Hope

The Purple Candle



Day 1

Advent – and a Dancer from the East

Rev. Leighton Ford

Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace. Luke 1:78-79

AS WE MARK the Advent season, I am thinking of one of the most engaging movies I have seen in recent years.

“Mao’s Last Dancer” is the story of Li, a peasant boy from a remote Chinese village, who is spotted and recruited by talent scouts for China’s national ballet company.

Li is so immensely gifted that when Ben, director of the Houston Ballet, leads a workshop in Beijing and sees Li’s talent he offers the young man a summer internship in Houston. Ben keeps Li as his house guest, and also teaches him English.

One evening at supper Li tells Ben that someone on the street addressed him with an unusual term that afternoon. He had not been able to find it in his English-Chinese dictionary.

“What was the word?” asks Ben.

“Chink,” says Li.

Ben’s expression doesn’t give away his shock. He pauses. You can see his brain turning over and over. How will he explain this racial slur?

“Li,” Ben says at last. “Imagine you are in a theater. It’s dark. The house lights are down. The performance has not started. But there is a slit in the curtain that lets the light through.

“That’s what we call a ‘chink,’ Li. An opening that lets light through. And that’s

what you are. A chink. When you dance, we see the light coming through!”

And Li’s face lights with joy.

The Scripture forecasts the coming of the Messiah with the promise of light:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come “ Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” (Isaiah 60: 1,3)

“The rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness.” (Luke 1:78-79)

God also chose a peasant boy from a tiny village to be his “chink.” He pulled the curtains aside to show us the light of his glory in the face of his Son Jesus Christ the Lord. And so Advent reminds us of the mission of the church to bring Christ’s light in dark places.

I can think now of many who have been “chinks” to me, letting the light of Christ shine through their own talents and gifts.

This Advent session, I want to offer to the Lord Jesus whatever gifts I have, and be just a small “chink” through which Christ shines.

One way we can do this is to help provide actual light through solar energy to millions around the world who have no electricity.

I’d say that would indeed be “Christmas Lights” – and would light up the face of God!

Rev. Leighton Ford is president of Leighton Ford Ministries, which focuses on raising up young leaders to spread the message of Christ worldwide. He has spoken face to face to millions of people in 37 countries on every continent of the world and served from 1955 until 1985 as associate evangelist and later vice president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Dr. Ford lives in Charlotte, N.C., with his wife, Jean. They have a married daughter, Debbie, and a married son, Kevin. Their older son, Sandy, died after heart surgery in November 1981.

Reflections:

- In what ways was Jesus a “chink”?
- Who has been a “chink for God” in your life? And how did they let their light shine on you?
- What can you do or what have you been doing that allows the light of Christ to shine to others?

Activity: Go to Google Earth and view the world at night. What is God thinking when he sees this picture? <http://www.google.com/earth>

Featured Organization: www.visiontrust.org

Energy Poverty Fact: After the sun goes down each day, there are 1.3 billion people who live in total darkness.

Day 2

Pushing Back the Dark

Josh Wilson

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. John 1:5

THE LYRICS OF “Pushing Back the Dark” draw out the biblical theme of light. The Apostle John lays it out in the fifth verse of his gospel. *Extinguish* is the word the translators of the New Living Translation chose for this verse. Other translations construe the original Greek verb as *overcome*, *conquer* or *comprehend*. You get the picture. Light overcomes darkness, conquers it, extinguishes it, renders its grasp powerless. The intensity of light is incomprehensible. Darkness is no match for light. They are opposites, but not equals.

“One million reasons why you shouldn’t even try, after all you’re just one heart, a single candle in the dark.” Have you ever felt like a single candle in a sea of darkness? “Pushing Back the Dark” is a confession that brings the darkness of our fears into the light of God’s revelation. When light shows up, even a candle’s worth, darkness moves back, along with its omnivorous effects.

“And there are shadows here, feeding on your fears that you don’t have what it takes, who are you to make a change But oh, don’t underestimate the God you know.” Light changes things.

Where I live, tropical thunderstorms are an almost daily feature of the summer weather pattern. In seconds, a hot, sunny afternoon can grow ominous, dark, foreboding. A few days ago we got hit by a line of storms moving from east to west, driving 45 to 55 mph winds. Tree branches snapped. Transformers blew, and suddenly, I found myself with my family in the dark, powerless. What do you think we did? Of course, we found a flashlight and lit a candle. Once the candle flame sent its dancing lumens around the room, we were comforted, we felt safe. Outside, the storm still raged. But we were no longer in shadow. We felt free to

carry on with life.

Light changes things. It brings freedom, reveals purpose and illumines our path. Called as Light-bearers, that’s exactly what we are called to do for others. As sinners saved by grace, God’s life-giving light has shone on us through Jesus Christ.

Let’s not forget what pushing back the dark means, biblically: dispelling ignorance (2 Corinthians 4:6), witnessing God-reality (Acts 26:18), driving out fear (Psalm 27:1), defeating Satan (Colossians 1:13), delivering from evil oppression (Ephesians 5:8-9) and a host of other real effects symbolized in the theme of light vs. darkness. “Pushing Back the Dark” is an anthem of encouragement to us, precisely because the God we follow *is* the light, shining through our seemingly small deeds “like a sunrise through the window.” When we respond to this truth with faith and love, God’s theme of light plays in and through us and illumines any circumstance, no matter how isolated or overwhelmed we may feel.

Josh Wilson and his wife, Becca, live in Nashville and are both active in supporting ministries. They have a special focus on Fathers House, an orphanage in Ghana. Josh became a Sparrow recording artist in 2006 and was named ASCAP Christian Songwriter/Artist of the Year in 2012. Josh has several hit singles including “Pushing Back the Dark.”



Reflections:

- What kind of darkness are you pushing back?
- Who is a person you know who is pushing back the dark?
- What do you need to do to keep from feeling overwhelmed?

Activity: Listen to “Pushing Back the Dark” by Josh Wilson on YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66wdK5q_Wr4

Featured Organization: www.fathershouseghana.org

Energy Poverty Fact: In South Africa, there are more than 3,000 schools without electricity.

Day 3

Face to Face with God

Donna Seaman

**So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."
Genesis 32:24-26**

I AM NOT a visionary like my husband, Ruston. I tend to see what is in front of me. I suppose Thomas (the show-me-the-wounds-in-your-hands guy) and I would have done well together.

Years ago I lived in Spain and had the pleasure of running with the bulls in Pamplona. Well, actually, I kind of shuffled along in the crowd behind the bulls, rolled up newspaper in hand just in case I needed it to fend off a 3,000-pound bull. Because I was among the cautious "runners" I never actually had a face-to-face with any of these remarkable beasts until this past spring.

Ruston and I were walking our on-the-leash dog, Rascal, and two of our born-free variety, Lucy and Lila. We had passed this field hundreds of times, and yes there was an exceptionally large bovine peacefully eating grass in the lower part of his domain. This particular evening he had company, a sweet looking smaller female variety of his kind and an even smaller fluffier version I would assume they called "son". Once the massive beast saw us, or perhaps it was Lucy and Lila, his head went down, his left hoof hit the ground repeatedly, and the tail began to flail wildly as he headed our direction. Serious sounding snorting set in. Wow, so this is what it feels like to have a face to face with a real live bull. We turned and gingerly walked away. Reminiscent of Lot's wife, I couldn't help myself, and with visions of a salt pillar dancing in my head, I turned to see him there in his field

like good old Saint Nic with,

*A wink of his eye
And a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know
I had nothing to dread!*

Have you ever experienced a moment when you knew it was the real deal – as Jacob did when he wrestled with God – where you “saw” God face to face? (Genesis 32:30). Perhaps a prayer was answered beyond comprehension. Perhaps in God's great mercy you were granted a sign, a certainty of direction. Or, perhaps you knew that although no great instant turn around had occurred, you were not alone in your time of grief, pain or undoing.

As Jacob was physically changed by his wrestling match as evidenced by the limp he acquired, the presence of God changed him into a new person named Israel. There is something very powerful about a face to face encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Christ the Son of God, our Savior, comes to humanity as a helpless infant unable to do anything for himself. It seems there is a lesson for us here about all that we hold tight in our grip, our smarts, our independence, our ways. Before it's all over, those things we hold on to will need to be “popped out of joint,” disabled, and although we may walk with a limp, we will be blessed, and we too can say we have seen God face to face.

Donna Seaman is the volunteer director of Integrity Fitness, a women's fitness ministry and gym. Donna holds a master's degree in education and enjoys speaking, teaching and leading women's retreats. She and her husband, Ruston, have two children, Leah and Ruston Ray. They live and pastor in the Chestnut Ridge Community outside Philippi, W.V.

Reflections:

- Where has God met you on the shore of the Jabbok River for a wrestling match?
- What were you holding on to or depending on that was keeping you from God's blessing?
- What advice would you give someone else who was in the midst of such a wrestling match with God?

Activity: Go online to New Vision's YouTube channel and watch “The Family Receives Light” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfjHUOzaLSA) to see how light can transform lives in Africa.

Featured Organization: www.visitwomenofpromise.com

Energy Poverty Fact: Ninety percent of children in Sub-Saharan Africa go to primary schools that lack electricity.

Day 4

A Father's Love

John Prusa

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.
Proverbs 13:12

CHRISTMAS FOR THE family of a Baptist pastor in Czechoslovakia under the hard rule of Stalin's Communism was very different than the joyous celebration of lights and feasts and gifts under the tree that I have known in America. I recall how important it was for our church, Vsetin Baptist, to gather together in support of our beliefs and in opposition to the Communist system.

When I was six years old, my father was arrested and sent to a hard labor camp for three years just for singing Christian songs on the train. Because of that, our family life became even more difficult. We were never sure if our dad would come home. My brother Dan and I did whatever we could to help our mom while trying to be kids. Finally, in the fall, when I was nine, our dad was released, and our family was once again reunited. The law required that everyone had to be employed and the only job my dad could find was unloading coal cars with a shovel 16 hours a day, six days a week. My brother and I only saw him on Sundays or some mornings as he rode off on his bike in the dim morning light.

Hockey was our national obsession, and my brother and I loved to go see the local hockey game. Because we were poor, we would go three hours before the game and hide under the stands in the cold before later appearing to watch our heroes on ice. We would often find stray pucks under the bleachers and make our own hockey sticks out of large roots of dead trees – they were as close as we could find to the shape required to make a slap shot on the makeshift ice rink we made.

One night as I was lying in bed, gazing out the window, I saw my dad peddle in. *I thought I saw it!* There on the back of his bike was what looked like a real hockey stick – the only thing in the whole world that I had longed for but dared

not to ask for because Dad worked hard just to earn enough for us to stay warm and fed. Each day until Christmas, I looked high and low through the house to find that stick. I inspected every possible spot I could think of before concluding I must have been dreaming.

Then came the magical moment. Christmas had arrived and much to my disappointment, the usual socks and underwear awaited me. I tried the best a broken-hearted boy could do not to cry while at the same time acting thankful for the handful of gifts I had unwrapped. I felt betrayed by my own emotions and just when I was about to melt and run away, my dad said, "John, your mother and I have something very special we would like to share with you." Then, he turned around the couch that was pushed against the wall. There tied and taped to the back of the couch was the most gorgeous Kohinor hockey stick, fully furnished with the stickers and all. I felt as if I was the luckiest boy in the world! It was more than I could ever bring myself to ask for.

Life was good. Our dad was home, our family was together, and I had a real hockey stick. What more could a nine year old want?

John Prusa and his wife, Kathy, have two children and four grandchildren. John is an electrical engineer and inventor who is responsible for the development of New Vision's renewable products. John has a history of innovations with three European patents. He is the Director of Research and Technology for New Vision Renewable Energy.



Reflections:

- How important is being together in the celebration of Christmas?
- What do you long for?
- Regardless of your circumstances, when have you felt content?

Activity: Discuss why freedom of religion is so important and pray for the people in the world who live under oppressive governments.

Featured Organization: www.storehouseofgod.org

Energy Poverty Fact: A recent UNESCO report shows that in Burundi and Guinea, only 2 percent of schools are electrified.

Day 5

Upside Down

Grant Funk

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

IT WAS MID-WINTER in Alaska 1993. Our ministry was 500 miles from the nearest roads, so airplanes were extremely important to the work we were doing. We had five kids at the time ranging in age from 3 to 17 years old. My wife was pregnant.

I was flying to another village with my 11-year-old daughter when the engine quit. All efforts to restart failed, and our only option was to once again execute a forced landing. The ice runway was not there this time, and we flipped upside down on a tributary of the Yukon River. It was 20 below, and the wind was whipping up a storm. We were going to have to settle in for the night. It was a very cold night but, at the same time, a good bonding time for me and my daughter. (She might not have thought so.)

After about 24 hours we heard the faint sound of the rescuers' snowmobiles. They arrived and immediately built a huge bonfire, offered us hot coffee and dry fish. It was not long before we were warmed and ready for the long ride to the nearest village.

My family was soon back together. However, not long after our reunion, Lenna started bleeding. The weather was bad. No rescue plane or even snow mobile could get to us in the remote location of our ministry. We were losing our baby and I feared, due to the massive bleeding, I was losing my wife as well. It was several days before we could get to medical attention.

Needless to say, that was a hard winter. Yet through it all, Proverbs 3:5-6 calls to us to continually entrust ourselves to a loving heavenly Father who knows what we are going through.

He remains on the throne when my world seems upside down. He is not dependent on my strong faith. He remains strong even when my faith falters. My prayers are not powerful. I simply have the privilege of talking to my powerful God. My faith is not strong, but the object of that faith is omnipotent. It is in the times of my weakness that his strength shines brightest.

The economics of Christmas have very little meaning when dealing with the loss of a baby or other crises that come our way. When the Christmas lights are boxed up and all the wrapping paper disposed of, Christ is still reigning. I not only want to keep Christ the center of Christmas, but of my entire life.

Grant and his wife, Lenna, have five children and have served as lifelong missionaries among Eskimo communities in Alaska. Grant is the founding director of AvSTEM, an aviation-based ministry that teaches aviation skills to Eskimo youth. Grant and Lenna are key leaders on the New Vision Global I.M.P.A.C.T. team.



Reflections:

- Describe a time when you felt like your life was upside down.
- How do you feel about God when help doesn't come in time?
- When your Christmas lights are boxed up and the wrapping paper is disposed of, what do you hope will be different for you?

Activity: Hold ice cubes in your hand while you pray for families who live in cold, dark areas of the world.

Featured Organization: www.avstem.org

Energy Poverty Fact: In the Democratic Republic of Congo alone, there are almost 30 million children attending school without power.

Day 6

All of Creation Praises the Creator

Dan Misleh

**The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Psalm 19:1**

AS HIS FAITH journey developed, St. Francis of Assisi became more and more enamored of the fact of Jesus' humanity. To help his fellow travelers in faith understand this, he was the first to create a live nativity scene in 1223. The practice continues today. In our home, for example, we display three of them of various sizes and shapes around in the Advent and Christmas seasons.

And the Misleh family is a typical Christian household. That is, we don't live on a farm with actual sheep and goats and hay. But I do think society loses something by not having the "earthiness" of a live nativity scene. St. Francis, with his connection to the earth and to animals and all of creation, probably *needed* to have a live nativity scene, because he knew that all of creation reflects the creator just as Jesus incarnate was the ultimate reflection of God.

Born in 1182 in Assisi, Italy, St. Francis of Assisi was the son of a wealthy silk merchant. In his youth, he lived an ostentatious and impious life before a spiritual and physical illness drove him to a Christian way of life. He renounced his wealth and embraced a life of poverty and prayer. He strove to follow Jesus' teachings as closely as possible and lived a life marked by severe poverty but also by joy and gratitude for God's good gifts of creation.

Shortly before Christmas 1223, Francis desired to re-create and make real the birth of Jesus by assembling a manger scene complete with ox and ass. St. Francis and his followers met at the scene with "the men and women of Greccio [who] with happy hearts got ready all the candles and torches they could to brighten the

night ["The night was made as bright as day,"¹

Since that first live nativity, subsequent generations of Christians have replicated the practice in an effort to prepare for Christmas. Today, nativity scenes appear outside of many churches during the Advent season, and are lit up with electricity rather than candles and torches.

Although modern nativity scenes continue to inspire awe at the birth of Christ, their illumination through electric lights – especially when viewed in light of St. Francis' environmental ethic – provides an opportunity for Christians to reflect on the extent to which we properly care for God's creation. We know, for example, that much modern electricity is generated through a process that contributes to both environmental degradation in general and climate change in particular. This, in turn, has consequences that are both disproportionately and unjustly borne by the poor for whom St. Francis had a special concern. So while St. Francis' creativity can inspire us to better appreciate the birth of Christ, his environmental ethic and concern for the poor invite us to reflect on the extent to which our individual choices and social systems build up or tear down God's kingdom here on earth.

One response to the life and example of St. Francis' within the Catholic community is through the efforts of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change. The Coalition encourages people of faith to take the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor. Yet whether or not Christians embrace the St. Francis Pledge, the appeal of St. Francis is an inviting one, calling all of us to reflect on how care for God's creation is a core element of our faith.

Since 1982, Dan Misleh has been involved in the social mission of the Church beginning with two years in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in Alaska through today. Dan currently serves as the Executive Director of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change. Dan and his wife, Susan, have three children and live in Cheverly, Md.

Reflections:

- Why is caring for creation important?
- Why did Jesus choose to be born in a stable?
- Whom do you identify with in the nativity scene?

Activity: Go online and read the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor and consider signing it. <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/the-st-francis-pledge>

Featured Organization: www.catholicclimatecovenant.org

Energy Poverty Fact: The lack of energy access limits a child's ability to study after dark. Electrification can help rural schools attract teachers, who are able to prepare their lessons better with access to electricity.

¹ Thomas of Celano, *The First Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. Christopher Stace (London, England: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2000), 82.

Day 7

Reflecting Light

Pat Baldrige

"I will give you treasures of darkness. I summon you by name." Isaiah 45:3

I WAS AWAKENED the other night with an extraordinary view out my window. In quiet stillness, my house, the trees in the yard, and the pergola over the patio cast stunning shadows in the wake of a beautiful bright full moon.

And I was struck by this thought:

The moon doesn't complain, nor is it jealous of the sun getting the most attention. Instead he is remarkably content not to turn attention to himself. Rather, he quietly serves the purpose he was made for – "to rule the night." He accomplishes this task with the help of the sun by faithfully reflecting the light given to him into the dark night. And the sun, whose job it is to rule the day, shines brightly everyday whether hidden by clouds or storms. Then the moon obediently beams without fanfare in the dark of the night whether we are aware of his brightness or not. What a divine gift!

What does reflecting the light of God look like? It's Joseph in the prison, Noah's family at work, Daniel bowing to pray, and Paul and Silas chained in the dark. It's as simple as being extra pleasant to the cashier at the grocery store or taking three homeless children to get pizza. And giving a compliment instead of criticism to bless someone and hear them say "You've made my day!" Or maybe even just singing God's praise in the midst of our own pain.

So just how does the moon reflect? He is *stationed* by God and yields to his simple task – *reflecting*. Where is your station? School? Work? Your neighborhood? Like the moon, each of us has a sphere of influence (our station) in which only we can reflect his glory.

Imagine what a difference it would make if we (like the moon) consistently reflected the Son's glory! And imagine God flooding the nations with grace and mercy – using us – by literally lighting houses for children whom we'll likely never

meet. Surely our obedience will capture God's heart as we help his people store a little sunshine each day so they have light each night.

Pat is the president of the Charlotte Christian Chamber of Commerce, author and professional speaker. As a "connector" her passion is to link Christian business professionals to make an impact for God's kingdom. Pat and her husband, Dave, live in Charlotte, N.C.



Reflections:

- Where is your most difficult place to reflect the love of Jesus?
- What outcomes would you see in yourself and others if you consistently and obediently reflected him there?
- Are you willing to try to display his likeness the next time you are in this challenging place?

Activity: Pray and ask the Holy Spirit *now* to prepare your heart for those future inevitable difficult situations where you need to show Jesus. And when they come, remind yourself of your pledge to mirror him in every situation.

Featured Organization: www.groundworks-midwest.com

Energy Poverty Fact: Energy poverty reduces the amount of time that children spend in school. Children are often forced to collect firewood or clean drinking water for cooking, heating and drinking instead of attending class.

Innovative Partnerships

In my experience, the type of innovation required to deliver really impactful change often happens at the intersection of different sectors, businesses and organizations – in quite unconventional partnerships that require two basic elements: a desire to help and a desire to create change. That is what having a New Vision is all about.

Operating from within large companies, intrapreneurs have the potential to effect change on a huge scale, but it is rarely a smooth journey, no matter how great the idea. Strong drive, a personal connection and deep passion for the particular idea do not happen overnight. But what inspires me at New Vision is watching the ideas come to fruition at these companies with generous souls and creative minds.

At the core of our mission, New Vision has created a way for individuals, youth, families, churches, businesses and organizations to get involved by providing light and hope to communities all over the world through our Light A School, Light An Orphanage, Light A Church and Light A Village program. Working with our nonprofit partners who have “feet on the ground” in over 21 countries, together we act as a bridge to get renewable products and training to community development managers in the under-resourced areas we serve. These frontline warriors work tirelessly to reach the orphans, children and families that do not have access to clean light or clean water.

And we do not act alone. It is through the countless number of volunteers, donors, fundraisers, churches, youth groups, colleges and universities – and corporate social responsibility actions – that allow us to provide light and create the empowerment strategy to make a lasting change in someone’s life. Everyone deserves access to clean and safe light. Without the basic necessity of light, life does not flourish.

Working to help the underserved population is at the core of our existence. It’s that simple. We are to extend a hand to those in need. And at New Vision we do that with light.

Pamela O’Brien
Director of Business Development & Communications
New Vision Renewable Energy
www.nvre.org

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” –Margaret Mead, American cultural anthropologist, writer and speaker

Second Sunday of Advent

Candle of Preparation

The Purple Candle



Day 8

Turning Darkness Into Light

Mitch Hescox

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. Isaiah 42:16

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, my entire family and members of my congregation traveled to Ghana to assist a village build a school. My favorite memory from the trip started as our youngest son, Zachary, then 19, was sitting under a thatched awning during a break from making bricks and used an empty plastic kitty litter bucket as a drum. Soon every young boy in the village had grabbed a bucket and joined in the wonderful symphony. Both the music and the smiles were contagious. From the workers to the men doing the heavy lifting to the women and young girls carrying water for the mortar, all joined the procession. Some even became part of the band as we all laughed, danced and enjoyed the concert. It's simply amazing the joy created through an empty kitty litter container and the willingness to share Christ's most precious gift: love.

Ghana, one of Africa's best democracies and best standards of living, still faces significant challenges. First, the light of education is dim in much of the rural and urban areas. In the village we were in, there was a just a three-room schoolhouse for hundreds of children, and our hope was to double the school from three rooms to six rooms. Even with six rooms, the school would have no electricity, no running water, no bathrooms, or any sanitary facilities. Imagine learning without books, paper, lights, or computers.

Not only is learning truncated without electricity, so is life itself. Wood, charcoal and dung are the primary sources of fuel for cooking, heating, and light. Driving in our cars each night was like taking a trip back in time. As soon

as the sun went down, the charcoal braziers attempt to break the darkness with feeble glows of light, smoke and toxic fumes. Over one million children die each year in Africa alone from respiratory diseases from smoke and particulates released by indoor fires. Another 300,000 women suffer severe burns from the same fires; that number is more than contract HIV/AIDS on an annual basis.

There is a way to turn darkness into light. As we celebrate Advent and the coming of Jesus as the Light of the World, it's time to reflect the Light's image and turn darkness into light. We can light up the world for Christ. Are we willing to share the love?

Sharing Christ means sharing love. The kind of love that turns an empty kitty litter bucket into the best drum in the world. Just as easily, we can turn darkness into light for life, and learning and share Christ's love simultaneously. Christ will not forsake the least of his children, and we can help make the rough places at least passable through the gift of light.

The Reverend Mitchel C. Hescox, an ordained Wesleyan minister, is President & CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), champion of the ministry's main focus which is that creation care is a matter of life, especially for children – born and unborn. Rev. Hescox is a frequent spokesperson for the creation care movement and has appeared frequently on national Christian radio and in Christian media.

Reflections:

- What ordinary things (loaves, fish, water, bucket, etc.) have you seen God use as a tool of ministry?
- What do you think about the fact that 60 percent of the world cooks its food each day with wood, charcoal or dung?
- What rough path do you need God's help smoothing?

Activity: After you share the devotional, please turn off all lights in your home and attempt to read the Isaiah 42 passage. Then blindfold one adult. If a child is present, allow them (or anyone) to guide the blindfolded individual around the room. Please remember the number of times you stumbled or passed through a "rough area." Next, give the guide a flashlight and traverse the same path as before. With just the flashlight on remove the blindfold and discuss the difference one light made. Please reread the Scripture with the flashlight and allow time for prayer – seeking the ways for you to share Christ's light for the world today.

Featured Organization: www.creationcare.org

Energy Poverty Fact: More people die each year from kerosene-related respiratory illness than from HIV/AIDS and malaria combined. More than half of them are below the age of five.

Day 9

Hosea and the Wayward

R. Scott Rodin

Return, Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips. Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount warhorses. We will never again say 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion." "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them." Hosea 14:1-4

I NEVER KNEW there were degrees of darkness until I was hiking through a series of caves in Belize. Our guide brought us to a place deep in the cave system and had us sit quietly and turn off our headlamps. The darkness was overwhelming. My wife was sitting right next to me but I had no indication that there was anyone within miles. I experienced sensory deprivation and mild panic as I had no idea which way was up or down. And then there was the loneliness, which could easily have turned to absolute terror had we not been allowed to switch our headlamps back on. I will never forget that utter darkness.

Through the prophet Hosea, God declares the sins of Israel in shocking detail. The depth of their sin is reminiscent of that utter sense of absolute darkness. It seems there is no hope for the rebellious and idolatrous nation. No hope, except the unfathomable love of God.

Hosea reminds us that no matter how deep our sin, how severe our wandering or how utterly dark our lostness, God's light overcomes it. Israel could not wander so far that they could escape the light of God's love. They would suffer for their rebellion and pay the price for their disobedience, but they could not embrace a darkness that was too great for God's light to obliterate. The darkness of a Belize cave was overwhelmed by a small flick of the flashlight button. Deep darkness is no match for simple light. So it is with our sin, our waywardness.

As our brothers and sisters experience the joy of switching on their sources of light, we can all rejoice that the coming Savior at Christmas was the light of the world. And "the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5) According to Hosea, it is that light that will bring healing to our waywardness and through it, we who were regarded as "not God's people" have become, in Christ, "children of the living God."

R. Scott Rodin (Ph.D., University of Aberdeen) is managing principal of OneAccord NFP, and Senior Fellow of the Engstrom Institute. He has been in fundraising and leadership development for 26 years, including serving as president of the Christian Stewardship Association and president of Eastern Baptist (now Palmer) Theological Seminary. He is the author of five books including Stewards in the Kingdom.



Reflections:

- Describe a time when you were afraid or lost in the darkness. What do you remember feeling?
- Describe a time when a little light (night light, candle during a storm, etc.) brought you peace of mind.
- What does it feel like to be lost?

Activity: Turn out all of the lights in the room. Sit in the dark stillness for a few moments, not speaking to anyone. Imagine you were in a one room hut in a land without electricity. Raise your hand to your face. Can you see it? Can you see anyone else? Remember and say a silent prayer for those afflicted by darkness in our world.

Featured Organization: www.yecaction.org

Energy Poverty Fact: A child studying by kerosene inhales toxic smoke equal to two packs of cigarettes a day.

Day 10

Hope and Despair

Jim Wallis

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Isaiah 61:1-4

PROCLAIMING JESUS AS the Light of the World is an audacious statement. It directly challenges all those idols that persistently attempt to replace God as the center of our lives and our world. In our culture, a selfishness that denies any obligation to anyone or anything beyond our own self-interest may be the greatest idol of all. It denies that demanding more and more energy at great cost to our environment and the people who live close to the land has problematic consequences. We have lost sight of the common good, and the consequences have been devastating.

I'm reminded of a trip I took to New Orleans in the summer of 2010, after BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig failed, spilling over 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico over 87 days. That July, I visited there with a delegation of national faith leaders, and a group of local residents took us out on their boats. Normally, our captain, Kevin, would have been out fishing. Instead he was showing us around Barataria Bay, showing us what the BP oil spill had done.

The first thing I noticed when our boat left the dock was the beauty of the place. It was easy to see how Kevin and so many others fell in love with it. It was so peaceful to hear the water lap against the boat and see wildflowers coloring the marshes. The life of a fisherman is certainly hard work, but our captain told me that the beauty they see every day makes it all worthwhile. But Kevin said he had seen nearly 25 percent of those marshes, the natural protection against hurricanes, disappear. The oil would only hasten their disappearance. "Flood waters recede and houses we have rebuilt," he told me, "but the estuaries are not restored so quickly, if ever."

The oil that filled the Gulf in 2010 was not a "spill," but a spoiling of God's creation – of wetlands and beaches, of God's myriad creatures, of lives and livelihoods. And we heard many testimonies of this devastation during my time in Louisiana. Three words kept coming to my mind: reflection, restoration and renewal.

As we patiently anticipate the Light of Christ entering anew this Advent season, we must cling steadfastly to the hope we profess. For our help comes from the Lord, who ensures that hope ultimately triumphs over despair, even in a world where selfishness seems to have momentarily displaced the common good. I hope you'll join me in sharing the light.

Jim Wallis is president and founder of Sojourners, where he is also editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine. Jim is a New York Times bestselling author, public theologian, speaker and international commentator on ethics and public life. He recently served on the White House Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and currently serves as the vice chair of the Global Agenda Council on Values of the World Economic Forum.

Reflections:

- How do you feel when a mess is cleaned up or a building is restored?
- How are wasteful and harmful connected?
- What are a few things that you believe are in the world but not like God would have intended?

Activity: Discuss how your family could apply reflection, restoration and renewal to God's creation.

Featured Organization: www.sojo.net

Energy Poverty Fact: By providing modern energy access, women and girls won't have to spend hours collecting firewood and can use this time to study or work.

Day 11

Light It Up

Johnny Hughes

Let those who love the Lord hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name. Psalm 97:10-12

THE SUN SANK quickly behind the mountain as Hawk, a Native American boy, was searching for the trail that would return him home. He suddenly found himself swallowed up by the darkness of night. Fear gripped his heart and his entire body, but at that moment, he could hear the voice of his grandmother speaking to him, “When you find yourself lost and in darkness, pray to the God of the heavens.” As her voice echoed deep in his spirit, he knelt down and began to call out to God for direction. Fear left him; he arose to his feet and began to cautiously make his way through the dark forest.

As he crossed over a hillside, something in the valley caught his attention. It was a very small light that penetrated the darkness. He quickly began to approach the small light, which seemed like a blazing beacon, and as he drew closer he realized it was the small candle that his mother would light each night in the window. He was home, and he knew that God had directed his path that night.

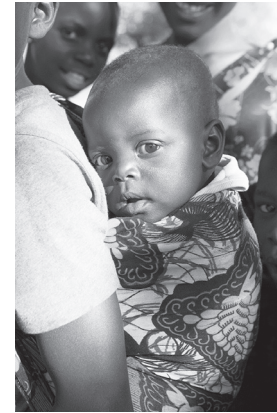
Many times the world around us seems like the dark forest that surrounded Hawk, but like Hawk, we too must know that our light is in Christ. He is our lamp and he turns our darkness into light. As individuals, we are like the candle in the window. Even at a great distance a single candle can penetrate the darkest of nights, but it is in our unity as a body that we see the darkness eradicated. When we, as single lights of God, come together as a unified group, the light becomes intense and drives the darkness away.

A single candle, a small campfire, and a roaring wildfire all begin the same way. Something has to ignite it. Today, what will you ignite?

- A single candle to penetrate the darkness?
- A small campfire to light up the immediate area around you?
- A roaring wildfire to drive away the darkness of this world?

Together we can create a world where light prevails and darkness has no place for existence. If we will step into our calling and responsibility as children of God, we can know a world where poverty becomes prosperity – both physically and spiritually. It is our reliance on God, the creator of light, that will change the world around us. He is waiting on us. He is waiting on you.

Reverend Johnny K. Hughes is the executive director of Indian Ministries of North America. He is an ordained bishop with the Church of God of Cleveland, Tenn. He and his wife, Becky, were married in 1987. They have a daughter, Elizabeth, and a son, Christopher, who are attending Lee University. The entire family is deeply involved in the mission of Indian Ministries of North America.



Reflections:

- Who can you be a single light to today?
- What or who did God use to ignite the flame of faith in you?
- What movement for human good do you pray becomes a wildfire?

Activity: Watch the video created by New Vision Renewable Energy's IMPACT youth group. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVxpRjwb9Bo>

Featured Organization: www.indianministries.org

Energy Poverty Fact: Thirty percent of health facilities in sub-Saharan Africa are without electricity.

Day 12

Hurry Up and Wait

Lanessa Murphy

But those who hope in the Lord shall renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

MY FATHER ALWAYS laughed and said that when the Lord was passing out patience, he was hiding in the back of what must have been a very long line. Not only did that hold true for my dad, but for me as well.

It was the summer of 1995; I was just a few months shy of being six years old. A typical Saturday had rolled around. My father was cutting the grass, and my mother was catching up on the housework. I occupied myself the best I could. I piddled around the backyard before remembering that I had left my bicycle, one of my favorite pastimes, at the sitter's house the day before. After my recollection, I immediately ran inside the house to ask my mother if we could go get it. She said we would, but I was just going to have to wait a little while longer because she was working on something and couldn't leave at the moment.

I hung my head in disgust and returned outside. I wandered around for what seemed like an eternity before going back to inquire about our trip. My mother again firmly reminded me that it would still be a little while before we went and then sent me off once more to the swing set.

When I could stand it no longer, I set off for the sitter's house. She lived within rock-throwing distance of our home. I had made the trek several times, but never alone.

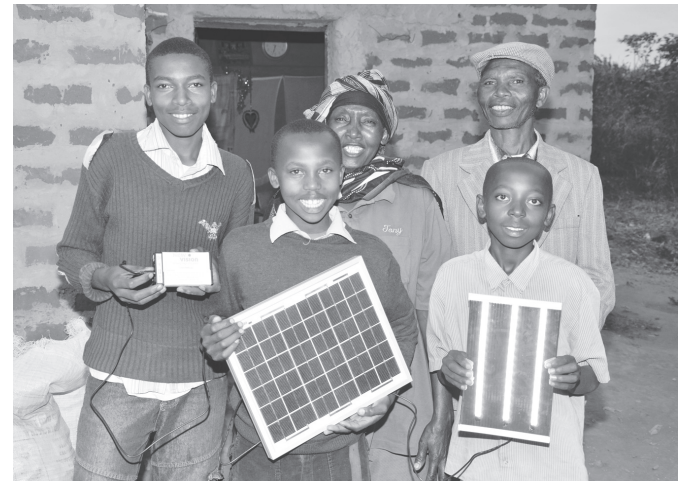
When I reached her house, I knocked on the door expecting her generally warm greeting and to pick up my bike. But after seeing the look on her face, I knew I was in big trouble – she was going to tell my mother!

My patience with the tasks at hand and individuals in my life improved. I often still find myself repeating Isaiah 40:31 to remind myself to just hold on.

It was also Isaiah who was inspired to write, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6) Eight hundred years later the Light of the World would appear – on a day *God* had planned, in a place *God* had prepared, to parents *God* had picked. The world had been waiting for the Messiah, now he was finally here.

I have to remind myself often that God works in his own time, not mine. Sometimes when we want something right now, it is important to remember it may not happen in the instant we request it. When I think I can't wait any longer, I realize waiting on him is more important than disobeying.

Lanessa Murphy is the executive assistant and project manager at New Vision Renewable Energy. She is a 2013 graduate of Alderson-Broaddus College and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with an emphasis on creative writing, as well as a minor in journalism. Murphy is a native of Philippi, W.V., where she currently resides.



Reflections:

- What things are hard to wait for?
- How do you feel towards God when his timing seems slow?
- Who is the most patient person you know?

Activity: Watch <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yo4WF3cSd9Q> and discuss how we are like the children deciding to wait for the parental figure (God) to give us our second marshmallow or to go off on our own and “eat it.”

Featured Organization: www.convoyofhope.org

Energy Poverty Fact: If a single kerosene lantern burns for an average of four hours a day, it emits over 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of carbon dioxide a year.

Day 13

Life in Malawi

Alexei Laushkin

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

WE WERE IN Malawi. It was a warm day in June when we arrived in the Fombe Village in the Shire River Valley. Though this was a river valley, there was no running water or tributaries in the village.

We approached a home where a mother of four was busy preparing her family's daily meal. She cooked over a large, open air fire just to the right of her home. We setup a meeting spot to conduct our interview.

I'll never forget asking her to show us her nighttime light source. She came from her home and brought me a very small, single light. The light was connected to a group of batteries that were themselves tied together in some form or fashion. This was the total light source for her family. She spent between \$7-12 a month replacing the batteries for a light that was no more than one eighth of what Americans might use as a night light in their home.

In the book of Genesis, Abraham approaches God and says, "When will I have a child?" In the moment I felt like this woman would have asked God, "Will I have a future?"

The Old Testament repeatedly upholds God's promise to provide a place and a home. How fundamental are those needs for too many of our brothers and sisters. Will God provide them a place of abundance, a place where they can raise their children's children in peace and safety? Will a future emerge for the people of Malawi?

Hope is the lifeblood of any community. As Christians we are taught to place our hopes in the Risen Lord. We are taught to set our problems and our needs before the Trinity. We are also told that God hears the cries of the brokenhearted, the widow, the orphan and the marginalized. We know that God will arise and defend

their cause.

This Advent will we awaken to the needs of our brothers and sisters around the world? Will we have the courage to step in the gap and be the true reflection of the Son of God? Will we follow Jesus and provide tangible hope and love to those seeking a future?

Alexei Laushkin is the vice president of the Evangelical Environmental Network. Alexei directs the Creation Care Teaching Institute, speaks across the country on "The Biblical Case for Creation Care," and is the anchor for the Creation Care Podcast, which is available on <http://creationcare.org> or on iTunes.



Reflections:

- Why are lights important for families at night?
- If you could have only one light, where would you place it?
- What problems do you need to give to God?

Activity: Count the number of battery-operated devices in your home. Guess how many batteries you use in a year.

Featured Organization: www.ccda.org

Energy Poverty Fact: In Tanzanian trails it has been found that most families use about 1-2 liters of kerosene per light per week for lighting.

Day 14

Christmas in July

Frank Rincon

For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

SOMEWHERE IN THE confines of an office building, a buyer at corporate headquarters for a national retail chain made one, tiny snafu. It just so happened that the buyer ordered the right product, Maseca corn flour, in 50-pound sacks. That was okay. It just so happened that there were four little words printed in bold, plain English on each sack. Imagine a neon sign on a brown paper sack – that’s how hard the words “Not for Retail Sale” were to miss.

These particularly marked bags are supposed to go to a manufacturer and not to a retail operation. Therefore Sam’s was sitting on thousands of sacks that obviously could not be sold to the public. The problem was too big to cover up with a super-duper thick Sharpie. This is where the story takes a positive and moving turn, where one little mistake of the computer mouse inadvertently ended up helping thousands of families in Southwest Florida and beyond.

So who do you call when you have thousands of pounds of Maseca sitting in your stores and the most prudent thing to do is donate it? Your local food banks, of course. If there is something that many nonprofits have perfected, it’s streamlining their operations and the speed at which they answer the door when opportunity knocks. Harry Chapin within minutes was handling the task of accepting 2,700 sacks of Maseca and putting into action a distribution plan. At a time when work is scarce for many, and countless families found themselves with empty cupboards, this one little mistake turned out to be one humongous blessing for many.

At Bethel Ministries in Immokalee, the youth group was called upon to help. At the Amigos Center, well over 500 people – each person representing one family – formed a line starting at 8 a.m. for distribution at 11 a.m. The center’s volunteer force did an amazing job of organizing and distributing. It was like Christmas in

July! Scores of mothers with strollers took their children in their arms and pushed the 50-pound sacks as they made their way home. In many instances, the children shared the stroller with a heavy sack and many people helped one another.

That day, I saw the people. I saw the smiles. I beheld the gratitude and witnessed the joy a company’s misfortune brought to hundreds of families. So on behalf of all those who were blessed, I want to thank you. And, when you come to Immokalee please do take the time to enjoy the smell of freshly made tortillas, tamales, pupusas, sopes, empanadas, gorditas, huaraches and chilaquiles.

Frank Rincon and his wife, Gennie, and their children, Saidee and Ethan, live in Immokalee, Fla. He is the associate pastor of Bethel Assembly of God. Frank and his parents and family have a passion for seeing their community transformed for the glory of Christ.



Reflections:

- When has someone’s error or misfortune led to your benefit?
- How does it feel to receive a blessing?
- How does it feel to give a blessing?

Activity: Make a list of different fruits and vegetables in your home. Remember the people whose labor helped make them possible. Say a prayer of thanks for the good earth and what it provides.

Featured Organization: www.expectinganencounter.com

Energy Poverty Fact: By changing one kerosene lamp for our light, an average family saves about \$100/year – typically a quarter to a third of total yearly income.

The New Vision Global I.M.P.A.C.T. Project

Wonderful Season of Light

Global I.M.P.A.C.T. is the growing edge of New Vision's ministry to ReEnergize Communities globally. There are currently 25 locations in 20 states and 5 international communities mentoring youth, empowering them with the problem solving skills to identify and address challenges in their own communities and all of the groups work together to help light the world. To find out how you, your church or organization might get involved, go to <http://globalimpact.nvre.org/>

The Global I.M.P.A.C.T. Project goes beyond traditional forms of youth mentoring to inspire and equip young people to develop solutions for the challenges they face and to have an impact on the global issues that surround us.

I.M.P.A.C.T. is a catalyst for connecting youth development organizations nationally and globally who are sharing resources and best practices in mentoring and community youth development and collectively ReEnergizing Communities around the world. We engage young people and mentors in under-resourced communities to be problem solvers and leaders, show youth how to contribute and make a meaningful impact in their own homes and communities and advance renewable energy solutions by bringing the benefits of solar-powered light and electricity to developing communities in the world.

One thing we have learned in our work around the world is that strong communities are the result of everyone contributing their gift. Because our gifts come from God, everyone has many of them. However, a gift isn't a gift until it is given. The worldwide power of New Vision Renewable Energy is that it creates opportunities for young people to give of themselves to light the world. They not only find the power of giving, but they connect with other young people around the world so they have a New Vision of themselves and their possibilities.

Many young people have become disconnected from the adult community in our times. This has weakened young people and their communities, because so many gifts are ungiven. New Vision has pioneered the connecting process by creating a movement worldwide where young people and adults can be productive together. It is this connection that is the heart of powerful community renewal.

John McKnight
Professor, Communication Studies (Emeritus), Northwestern University
Co-Director, Asset Based Community Development Institute
www.abcdinstitute.org

Third Sunday of Advent

Candle of Joy

The Pink Candle



Day 15

The Great Accommodation

Art Erickson

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Philippians 2:6-8

RICHARD SELZER, a surgeon and gifted writer, in his book *Mortal Lessons*, describes a poignant scene in a hospital room that touched me deeply. I share it with you, along with a brief comment, as an early Christmas gift!

“I stand by the bed where a young woman lies, her face postoperative, her mouth twisted in palsy, clownish. A tiny twig of the facial nerve, the one to the muscles of her mouth, has been severed. She will be thus from now on. The surgeon had followed with religious fervor the curve of her flesh; I promise you that. Nevertheless, to remove the tumor in her cheek, I had to cut the little nerve.

Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamplight, isolated from me, private. Who are they, I ask myself, he and this wry-mouth I have made, who gaze at and touch each other so generously, greedily?

‘Will my mouth always be like this?’ she asks.

‘Yes,’ I say, ‘It will. It is because the nerve was cut.’

She nods and is silent. But the young man smiles.

‘I like it,’ he says. ‘It is kind of cute.’

All at once I know who he is. I understand and I lower my gaze. One is not bold in an encounter with a god. Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I am so close I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers, to

show her that their kiss still works.”

“He twists his own lips to accommodate to her crooked mouth. . .” Is there not a beautiful and powerful sense in which that is what was transpiring in the Bethlehem stable – and continued to transpire throughout the life and, yes, death of our Lord Jesus? The Great Accommodation!

God in Jesus twisted his lips to accommodate to the crooked and desperately needy mouth of humanity.

We are called by Jesus himself to be “like him” . . . to follow his example, to conform to his image. Does this not mean that we, in whom Christ dwells, *must twist our lips to kiss (love, embrace, befriend), i.e., “accommodate to” the crooked and needy mouths of people all around us who need the touch of the Savior?*

I am always moved at this time of year by the absolute radical breathless action of God in expressing his love in such a humble, yet mysterious way. For me it expresses, in terms I can understand, the motive and method that shaped his encounter with us. I trust that I will allow the lips of God to twist in such a way to accommodate my crooked lips.

That is what he came for”

That is what he died for”

And that is what he is doing in the world today.

Art Erickson, founder and CEO of Urban Ventures Leadership Foundation (UVLF) in Minneapolis, Minn., represents a career commitment of working with young people, facilitating community development, and forming collaborations and networks. He and his wife and family have lived in Minneapolis for over 40 years.

Reflections:

- In which ways does God twist his lips for you?
- In which ways do you twist love or befriend others?
- List ways you can think of that God accommodates the people he created.

Activity: Select one person and go out of your way to help them in some way, and do it with joy. Remember, it’s not about you; it’s about him.

Featured Organization: www.urbanventures.org

Energy Poverty Fact: There were 282,000 fire-related burns worldwide in 1998.

Day 16

Get Out the Candles

Mary Nelson

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. John 1:4-5

OUR LITTLE CHURCH and community group set out the table, cross, lights and gathered around on the dark street corner outside of church – a prayer vigil to rid the streets of drugs and violence. There had been threats from drug dealers who didn't want their lucrative business disturbed.

The little band of people huddled around the table, offering prayers for people passing by, sharing opportunities for jobs and school and groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous for others.

Gun shots, shouts and screeching tires filled the night in Chicago's West Side, and then the lights went out on the street and all was dark. A shudder of fear spread through the group – a desire to go inside to safety. But one from the group went into the church and found some red candle bits. Others followed finding matches, and one-by-one, we lit the candles in that vast darkness.

Soon our candles became beacons of light on that cold street. Then, someone started began singing, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." And as our candles glowed, our voices got louder, and we danced in the street with voices of courage and clarity. *And darkness has never put it out.* (CEV)

In these dark December days, when so much around us seems broken and hopeless, God's promise, the Advent of God's Son in our midst is the light of promise, of hope, of joy. God's promise of light is sure. We can depend on it.

But we can't sit hopelessly, helplessly by and expect things to change. We can't retreat into safe places. We've got to go find the candles, the matches, the tools for action in our situations. They are there; we just need to look.

And then we've got to pass the light on to others. We need each other to make a difference, to build community, to share with each other. And when we do, we too

can take our little lights, lift up our feet, and dance in the face of danger to sing the song of hope and be a part of creating a new future – of bringing in God's vision of peace and wholeness and joy for the community.

Mary Nelson is president emeritus of Bethel New Life, where she served for 26 years. Bethel pioneered in creative community-based efforts to build healthier, sustainable and equitable communities on Chicago's West Side. She is currently the executive director of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. She serves on the boards of Sojourners, Christian Community Development Association and others. Mary has her Ph.D. from Union Graduate School and six honorary Ph.D.s. She is on the faculty of Loyola University Graduate School. Mary seeks to be faithful to God's call to work for justice and community and she still lives and worships in her West Side Chicago community.



Reflections:

- What are the things that bring darkness in your life, in your community?
- Where are the signs of light, of hope in your life, in your community?
- What are you going to do to share the light, the hope, the joy?

Activity: Count the number of flashlights or candles you have in your house. Light one in a dark room, and pray for a family in a dark community somewhere else.

Featured Organization: www.renewingeden.com

Energy Poverty Fact: Two and a half million people (350,000 of them children) suffer severe burns each year, primarily due to overturned kerosene lamps.

Day 17

In My Neighborhood

Rev. Matthew J. Watts

I am the light of the world whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. John 8:12

You are the light of the world. A city that on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16

THE TWO PEOPLE that best illustrate the principal of letting your light shine is Elder Tom Toliver of the Grace Bible Church and his wife, Phyllis, the mother of the Grace Bible Church in Charleston, W.V., where I serve as Pastor. Tom is over 80 years old, and they have the energy, vigor, and enthusiasm of a couple half their ages. We refer to Tom as America's oldest teenager. Tom and Phyllis live on the West Side, just one block from the church. The West Side of Charleston is a community with all of the negative pathology of an inner city, which includes drug trafficking and the associated crime and violence that leaves in its wake a community of brokenhearted and broken spirited children.

The Tolivers have chosen to let their light shine in our neighborhood so that others, particularly children, can see their good works and be drawn to them where they can be introduced to Jesus Christ and learn to glorify the Father. One of the Tolivers' good works projects is Tom's beloved community gardens. Tom and Phyllis are using community gardens as way of bringing the community together, to teach children how to garden and to grow fresh vegetables for community residents.

Everyday a number of neighborhood children follow the light to the Tolivers' house where they receive a hot meal, help with their homework, and words of

encouragement and a word from the Lord. Two regulars at the Tolivers' house are Derrick and his sister, Donna. They have been coming there for the past seven years – ever since their mother was sent to prison for drug trafficking. The Tolivers made a commitment to their mother they would do everything in their power to assist the stepfather in raising the children. So every day for the past seven years, Mr. and Mrs. Toliver have assisted the father in getting Derrick and Donna to and from school and their various activities. Many of Donna and Derrick's friends, mostly from broken homes as well, have followed Donna and Derrick to the light that shines from the Tolivers' lives and home.

There are millions of children all over the world who live in communities that are in spiritual darkness like the West Side of Charleston. These communities resemble Nazareth of Galilee where the people were in deep spiritual darkness and needed to hear and see the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pastor Matthew J. Watts is the senior pastor of the Grace Bible Church of Charleston, W.V., where he has served for over 17 years. Watts is the founder and director of the Hope Community Development Corporation, a non-profit organization with the mission of empowering the inner city through spiritual renewal, education, employment and training, and economic development.



Reflections:

- In what way can you be or are you a light to children in need of love?
- List some of the benefits of helping others.
- Who are the Tolivers in your world?

Activity: Adopt a family/person in your community who may need a little extra tender loving care. Prepare a meal, take them to the store, or just simply lend an ear. Remember, your first act of kindness should not be your last.

Featured Organization: www.mjwattsministries.com

Energy Poverty Fact: Every new technology creates new entrepreneurs. There are now people that will service and repair our light where needed.

Day 18

In the Flesh

Dave Hillis

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

A FEW YEARS ago I was asked by World Vision to go with 12 others on a “vision trip” to Uganda. We were given the opportunity to see the HIV/AIDS crisis first-hand and witness the things that the Ugandan faith community and others were doing to turn the tide on this dreadful disease. They were making great progress, and we were there to find out the reason why. However, it wasn’t until we flew back to London that the answer occurred to me and the gift of Advent showed up.

We arrived in London on an early fall afternoon. We decided to take a walk to find a restaurant and see the famous Trafalgar Square. As we approached Trafalgar Square, I noticed something peculiar. There was a great mass of people, probably 2,000 plus, that were completely silent. I heard a wafting of music that slowly moved in and out of the crowd. Given that the sun had now set, I also noticed that in the very center of this crowd were six giant cones of light. Roughly 20 feet high, filled with a kind of incandescent illumination. I asked a nearby Brit what all this commotion was about. He responded by saying, “Don’t you know? This is a celebration of the vernal equinox where light procreates itself on earth, and we celebrate the creation of life.”

I then walked across the street to the oldest church in London, St. Martin of the Woods. As we approached the church we noticed a 5 by 5 solid block of granite on the church’s portico. It was oddly placed, but maybe even more curiously, completely unadorned. I then heard my son say, “Dad, you should look at this.” What he had noticed was a verse carved into the side of the block

of granite that said, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” As we began to walk around the slab, I heard a further remark from my son: “Will you look at this?” The baby, unlike many of the other pieces of art and replicas of the infant Jesus where everything is clean, shinny and cherub-like, had the defenseless demeanor of a real-life baby just being born. To top this jarring picture off, the artist had decided to keep the umbilical cord attached to the holy infant. And then it occurred to me – there’s the “something different” that explains the startling results of Uganda’s fight with HIV/AIDS, the difference that is at play in anything that is truly changed for the better – the power of the incarnation.

I would be lying if I didn’t say that the dancing columns of light with a quiet wafting of music filling up Trafalgar Square did not appeal to me. It appeals to the senses and doesn’t ask for much in return – two things that are always seductive. And if there is anything that me and the world in which we live needs, it is change. This experience further emphasized the ridiculous difference and outright outlandish claim the Christian faith makes during this Advent season – that the blood spattered, umbilical chordee, defenseless little baby is the most powerful force ever unleashed on humankind.

As we enter into the season of Advent let us be mindful that the light we so cherish is one that came as us, so as to save us, because it is like us.

Dave Hillis is the president of the Leadership Foundation whose mission is to facilitate the social and spiritual renewal of cities by developing, strengthening and sustaining the work of local leadership foundations, of which there are 50 internationally. Dave and his wife, Teresa, have three sons, Patrick, Ryan and Jordan.

Reflections:

- In what ways have you seen light in the humanity around you?
- Who has been a light in the flesh to you?
- What areas in your world do you need to become a light to?

Activity: Make a list of some of the people who have been light incarnated in your life and write, text, email or call them to thank them for the gift they made in who you are today.

Featured Organization: www.leadershipfoundations.org

Energy Poverty Fact: In sub-Saharan Africa, kerosene is a “woman’s fuel.” In rural areas, a woman walks many miles to buy kerosene at the market.

Day 19

Unseen Blessings

Adrian Sandoval

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.
Hebrews 11:1

IN SO MANY lives across the world, darkness, pain and hopelessness reside therein. A lost life swaying slowly, back and forth like on a swing in the woods, repeating over and over again. Wondering wildly if wisdom, knowledge or freedom will be offered to come set the captive free. To free a life that seems to be overwhelmed by huge, yet small, circumstances, especially to the all mighty, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace! Praying for a season of salt, to flavor the crop, to bring a taste to those who need it at most. Fasting to sacrifice those things that sometimes in our own lives jump ahead of the Creator's call in our own lives. So a season of praying and fasting is upon us as we work our way up to the time of year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Celebrate the one who would come to reconcile the world unto God, and the time where this season would dawn upon us, where the gap will be closed between God and mankind.

It reminds me of a young family I came across. This family was in a season of trusting God. They were so full of the world's hurt and pain. They had faith that God would see them through as this was their substance of things hoped for. (Heb. 11:1) It was amazing to see that they weren't focused on the things of this world, but I was deeply encouraged that they were so focused on the blessings that were not yet seen. It's amazing as I asked one of the young children in the family, "What is it you are looking forward to when getting to heaven?" He kindly and passionately responded, "I am looking forward to the day when I have it where there is no more pain, no more struggling, no more fighting, but a time in the Lord where there will be PEACE!" It was an unusual response as I expected a response that reflected the idea of life that we try and attain while on earth, focused on those things that are supposed to fill our lives with joy. Those things run out.

In this season, let us take to heart and practice Psalm 46:10. He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

As we focus through prayer and stillness, we can know that our God, our Prince of Peace, will be right there with us. Life can be full of things; our schedules can be full to brim and to the point where we don't have time for families or ourselves. So let's be encouraged and take Psalm 46:10 in this season of Advent and meditate on God. Listen for his voice; listen to what we need to hear to continue living the Christian life to its full potential.

Adrian "AGE" Sandoval and his wife, Sateba, and their daughter, Adriana, live the hood in Denver, Colo. AGE is the founder and leader of Tha MYX International, a hip-hop ministry and nontraditional church.



Reflections:

- How does your prayer life affect your personal peace?
- Where is the most peaceful place you have ever been?
- What do you look forward to in heaven?

Activity: You have three gas tanks. The tanks represent physical, spiritual and emotional state of being in your life. List out the things that fill you up physically, spiritually, and emotionally and list out those things that drain you in the same area.

As you see the lists, you see what it is in your life that drains you and fills you. Ask God in this time of Advent to help you be more than an overcomer in your life in these areas. This can catapult you to new heights in your walk with God. May you have a blessed season of Advent until we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

Featured Organization: www.thamyx.org

Energy Poverty Fact: In urban settlements or slums, women buy kerosene in as little as 10c increments or by the tablespoon.

Day 20

A Loving Son

Jimmy Dorrell

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17

LOSING A CHILD is painful beyond words. Every parent assumes they will breath their last breath years before their kids. But no such promise is given us.

Seth was a gift from God to us for 32 years. From day one to his last breath, he was a bright light in our family and in the communities he lived. The first born of four children, Janet and I experienced what most every parent feels so deeply in the delivery room”an incredible sense of awe and wonder. From diapers to home school to Little League to the challenges of youth, he was so loved and so loving. Friends were attracted to his humorous wit and his responsible nature.

With a college degree in hand and soon off to get a graduate degree, the summer between was life-changing for him. For four months he chose to live in Haiti, in a small village where overwhelming poverty and darkness reigned. It was there, God seemed to call him from his deepest inward parts to live a life that would make a difference. Once back in the States, he and his new wife moved into a struggling poor neighborhood in West Philadelphia to complete his master’s degree and went to work among the under-resourced of their blighted communities. Having grown up in a broken neighborhood, Seth and Sarah, along with baby Finley, embraced the poverty, crime and dysfunction as opportunities to serve instead of run away from. For eight years they loved their neighbors and were incarnational lights of hope in the community.

Yet the poverty and need experienced firsthand in Haiti could not be forgotten. With a sense of excitement only the called understand, they began a new life in Northeast Haiti to provide economic and community development through water wells, schools, microloans and community health care. Despite

the challenging living conditions, they loved life and the people they served.

Then the unexpected happened. Seth was diagnosed with third-stage rectal cancer and had to immediately return to the states to begin surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. The next year was hard, but others could hardly tell it by his face or attitude. His humor never succumbed to the harsh side effects, and he refused to give up. During his recovery, we hired him at Mission Waco/Mission World to continue outreach efforts from Waco to Haiti, Mexico City and India. His work was amazing, even with periodic setbacks. Within a year, things were looking great for his future.

Last June, on a mission trip with us to Mexico City, Seth died. It was unexpected and traumatic. He had spoken words of life and light in a worship service that morning and breathed his last breath that evening. How could it be?

The pain has been deep and overwhelming for our family and his. We cry often. There are no words that can really console such loss. But there is hope”hope through the Resurrection that the last enemies of sin and death have been conquered through the Light of the World. And we celebrate the ongoing light of his legacy.

In October, 25 solar-powered lights were purchased from the memorial fund set up in Seth’s name. Students and adults, under the guidance of New Vision staff, including Seth’s younger brother, Zach, built panels that will be installed in dark homes in Haiti in the months ahead. Light will expel the physical darkness in the village because the Light that expels all darkness still reigns, even in death. “May the light shining before men glorify the Father who is in heaven!”

Jimmy Dorrell is the founder and executive director of Mission Waco/Mission World and pastor of Church Under the Bridge for 21 years. He and his family moved into a poor neighborhood in Waco, Texas, 33 years ago and still live in the same house. With academic degrees from Baylor University (B.A. and M.A.), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div) and Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (D.Min), he is an adjunct professor at Baylor University, Truett Theological Seminary and Bakke Graduate University with a focus on Christian community development classes. Jimmy and Janet had four children, with the loss of their oldest son this past summer, and they enjoy their four grandchildren.

Reflections:

- Share a special memory of someone who is no longer living and explain how their life had a positive effect on you.

Activity: Write a note to someone who is grieving this Christmas because of the loss of someone they love.

Featured Organization: www.missionwaco.org

Energy Poverty Fact: Up to 25 percent of the poor’s income is needed to purchase kerosene.

Day 21

Why the Shepherds?

Rev. David Newman

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2:8-12

NO KID WOULD have ever raised his hand and replied, "When I grow up I want to be a shepherd!" On the pecking order of jobs, "a shepherd" was near the bottom. If you had any skills, business sense, ambition, or could do anything else, you would. Shepherds were, quite simply, very ordinary men.

Not only were they ordinary, but they were considered "offensive" to most people. When the Bible says that they were "living" out in the fields, it means that these were not your "take a bath, brush your teeth, clean shaven" kind of guys. They would have slept out in the field and smelled like campfires and sheep.

However, one common night in a common field, something happened that was anything but common! The night was probably dark, and the sheep were probably bleating, and the coals were probably dimming, and the shepherds were probably sleeping, when suddenly the sky exploded with light! The sheep scattered, and the men screamed. When their eyes finally adjusted to the light, they saw a sight and heard some words that would never be forgotten!

An angel, a shining messenger from God, was before them. He told them not to be afraid, and then said, "I bring YOU good news that will cause great joy for all the people." He then told them the greatest news of all time, that Jesus, the Savior was born! And as if that sight and those words were not enough to amaze them, the entire sky was then lit up with angels, singing and praising God. The world had

changed forever.

The strangest word to me, however, in this beautiful scene is the word "you." When God wanted to give the greatest news that has ever been given, why did he give it first to the shepherds? I mean, he could have chosen important people or religious people or people that were generally considered to be "good" people. Why would he choose the ordinary, offensive outcasts? Why the shepherds?

Perhaps God wanted to shout, "I am offering my greatest gift to everyone! Whether you feel like you have your life together or you feel like a religious outcast, my gift is for you! Whether others would say your life is significant or people would say your life is very ordinary, my gift is for you!"

God wanted to give his greatest gift the entire world. And I love how these simple men dropped everything and said, "Let's go! There is nothing in our lives as important as this gift!" May we have the attitude of the shepherds. No matter who we are or what we have done, may we embrace God's amazing gift!

David Newman is the lead pastor of Antioch, the church of the Y, near Cincinnati, Ohio. He spends most of his time teaching people about Jesus, coaching his four sons in youth sports and hanging out with his amazing wife. David has a ministry passion to uplift the "C" in the YMCA by helping to plant churches within YMCAs. His long-term vision is to see a vibrant church planted within the 14,000 global locations of the YMCA.



Reflections:

- Describe a time in your life when you got really good news. How did it make you feel?
- Describe a time when you got bad news. How did that make you feel?
- Why do you think the angels chose the shepherds to sing to?

Activity: Count or guess the number of lights on your Christmas tree.

Featured Organization: www.orphanstoambassadors.org

Energy Poverty Fact: Over 10 years, one solar LED light could replace 600 liters of kerosene and cut 1.5 tons of CO₂ emissions, while solar lighting could save up to \$800 million in avoided fuel purchases.

Compassion International and New Vision

We accomplish more when we work together. The partnership with New Vision to bring clean light to rural Kenya helps Compassion's partner churches have an increased impact in their community. Clean light means the church is able to achieve the following:

- Meet Spiritual Outcomes – In one of the first homes that received a solar light, a little girl sat under the light reading the Bible with her mom. How precious!
- Meet Physical Outcomes – Respiratory illness is one of the leading health issues for Compassion-registered children. We will see a reduction in illness when children no longer have to breathe toxic kerosene fumes every evening.
- Meet Cognitive Outcomes – Neither a kerosene lamp nor a small solar lantern provides enough light for a child to study by, but the New Vision solar light does. Children ran for their bookbags when the solar lights were turned on for the first time, and these children are going to see improved grades at school as a result.
- Meet Income Generation Outcomes – Kerosene might cost a family up to half of their disposable income. Money saved is the same as money earned.
- Meet Socio-emotional Outcomes – At Compassion, we believe that giving a child and his/her family hope for the future matters. Clean solar lighting in homes help children feel more positive about their chances of succeeding in life and gives them a sense of hope for the future.

What better gift can we give a child than the gift of hope? Thank you New Vision for your partnership with Compassion to give children hope!

Gregg Keen
Regional Complementary Interventions Director – Africa
Compassion International
www.compassioninternational.org



Fourth Sunday of Advent

Candle of Advent

The Purple Candle



Day 22

Light of the World

Steve Donaldson

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2:15-17

TIM HUGHES SINGS,

*Light of the World
You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes
Let me see.*

Every day, I am reminded of things I take for granted, simple things – things that others don't have the privilege to enjoy, like toothbrushes.

One of my friends delivered a Rural Compassion care package, including toothbrushes, to a family of seven living in a mobile home in a "forgotten" town in rural America. Upon opening the package, one of the little girls reached for the brand-new toothbrush, and tears started streaming, smudging her cheeks. She quickly and quietly left the room.

My friend wondered, "Did I do something wrong? Is it the wrong color?"

The girl returned, still tightly clutching the new toothbrush, and extended an old, worn-to-the-nubs toothbrush.

"We've all been using this one," she said quietly.

And now, whenever I brush my teeth, I pray for families just like this one.

The roots of Rural Compassion and Convoy of Hope were born one day in 1969, the day my dad was killed by a drunk driver. My mom was also severely injured, leaving my three siblings and me in desperate need of a support system. The Davis family answered the call and welcomed us into their home – a 10' x 50' mobile

home. Ten people sharing the fullness of life under one roof. As a ten-year-old boy, I personally experienced the depth and power of compassion, and that has made all the difference. As Andy Stanley says, "Do for one what you wish you could do for all." The Davis family demonstrated their faith by loving us when we had nothing to offer in return.

Jesus was born in a forgotten place, to a poor couple, under a blanket of darkness in a manger. The Light of the World was not born in a palace of privilege but experienced fully the plight and struggles of those who pray for sufficient daily bread.

Today, there are more than one billion people who don't have access to electricity in the majority, developing world. In these places forgotten by the glitz-and-glam media, children work all day to get food and water for their families and then try to study at night under the toxins and hazards of open flames. Those of us in the West often take our lights and electricity for granted, complaining when a storm temporarily knocks out our power supplies.

Our passion for God will be shown in the compassion we extend to others.

As followers of Jesus who embodied light in the dark places, we should be the first to bring light to places people may think are obscure, but God has not forgotten. Because a little compassion really can change the world.

And when new friends around the world are able to see because of the gift of light, our prayer is that they will also see the true Light, who gives life to all people.

Steve Donaldson is the founder of Rural Compassion, a non-profit organization that partners with pastors in rural communities, equipping and encouraging them to bring hope and transformation to their communities. Through Rural Compassion and Convoy of Hope, Steve has worked around the world sharing the same compassion with new friends that the Davis family first extended to his family. Steve lives in Ozark, Mo., with his wife, Rebecca, and has three sons.

Reflections:

- Name some of the small things that make life better.
- Why is it not good to share a toothbrush?
- How does your passion for God show up in your compassion for people?

Activity: Think of a very ordinary item that you can wrap or give as a gift to brighten someone's day. Be creative. The smallest thing given with great love may brighten someone's day.

Featured Organization: www.ruralcompassion.org

Energy Poverty Fact: It is mostly the women in the house that have to walk for hours with a small container or even a plastic bag to stand in line to buy expensive kerosene for their lamps.

Day 23

This Little Light of Mine

Marilee Dunker

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe. Philippians 2: 14-15

MY FATHER, BOB PIERCE, is best remembered as the founder of World Vision and Samaritan's Purse. But from his earliest days with Youth For Christ, my father's passion was to share the light of the Gospel with a lost world.

In 1947 and '48, YFC sent Dad to China for his first overseas crusades. The experience had unexpected significance, because it was there that God first opened his eyes to the suffering of the poor. When he was challenged by missionary Tena Holkeboer to "do something" about the need of a little girl named White Jade, he gave his last \$5 and promised to send more when he got home. This seemingly insignificant side-note would later become the seed for World Vision Child Sponsorship, which today blesses over 4 million children every year.

In celebration of World Vision's 60th anniversary my daughter, Michelle, and I took a video team to Amoy (now called Xiamen), where my father met White Jade. Our "official" assignment was to learn more about White Jade, but my personal prayer was that God would lead me to someone who could answer the questions I had about my father and the early converts.

We talked to over a dozen elderly saints who had lived their lives on the island. They attended White Jade's school, but were not able to identify her by her English name. No one remembered Youth For Christ or my father. They kept asking me: "What was his Chinese name?"

"I don't think he had one," I would answer sadly.

On our last day, we asked an 89-year-old gentleman if he remembered Youth For Christ or Bob Pierce. My heart sank as he, too, shook his head regretfully. "I'm sorry. I don't remember Youth For Christ." There was a pause and then he added, "I

do remember Youth With Christ."

"Yes!" I screamed. "That's it! Youth With Christ!" Our Chinese hosts chattered excitedly. Of course they remembered Youth With Christ! Why hadn't we said that in the first place?

I asked him if he remembered a teacher named Bob Pierce. Mr. Lim began with great excitement. And he said to me, "Oh, you mean Beebakshoo!"

This final word came out sounding to me like 'Reebok shoes' and I looked at Michelle to make sure I had heard him right. "Bee-bak-shoo?" I repeated. "You're saying that my father had a Chinese name?"

"Sure, sure," Mr. Lim exclaimed. "We Chinese don't use names like Bob Pierce. We called him Peer (Pierce) Bakshu (pastor). Peer Bakshu."

I sat for a minute trying to take in the significance of this moment. Was I really supposed to believe that now, after all this time, he and his friend really remembered my dad?

"And you are sure this was my dad?" I challenged.

"Yes. He was here a very short time," Mr. Gow said. "But I remember. He taught us a song."

With that Mr. Gow lifted his finger and began to sing "This Little Light of Mine" in a strong, clear baritone.

I couldn't hold back the tears as I recognized the children's song my daddy had taught me. Years later he would write that he had been a "crowd favorite" because wherever he went he taught the beloved chorus, "complete with the hand gestures." I lifted my finger and began to sing along, as did Michelle and Mr. Lim. Let it shine, Mr. Gow! Let it shine!

Marilee Pierce Dunker is the daughter of Bob and Lorraine Pierce, founders of World Vision and Samaritan's Purse. Since 2001 she has worked for World Vision as a speaker, writer and international ambassador, travelling to over 35 countries. She is the author of the award winning book, Man of Vision, and is a frequent contributor to World Vision Magazine. She and her husband, Bob, live in San Dimas, Calif.

Reflections:

- Make a list of those whose faith paved a path for you.
- Dream big: If God can turn a \$5 gift in to a movement to help 4 million children, what can he do with you?
- Remember a time you were challenged "to do something." Did you accept the challenge? What did you do?

Activity: Go to Google Earth and look at the world at night and pray for people in the dark. <http://www.google.com/earth/>

Featured Organization: www.worldvision.org

Energy Poverty Fact: Women represent 70 percent of rural poor most affected by energy poverty.

Christmas Eve
The Christ Candle

The White Candle

Day 24

On Fire for God

Rev. Ruston Seaman

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" Luke 24:31-32

AS A BOY, I remember having really good feelings about Jesus at Christmas. It seemed magical watching people do nice things for others, getting bigger tips as a paper boy, eating special food, having time off from school, and the real bonus – we celebrated Jesus’ birthday and we got the presents. What a winning combination for a clueless, young seeker! I saw no downsides.

Thanks to my emerging lobbying skills, I won the right to be the youngest kid in our church’s history to light the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve. I could hardly sleep the night before as I worked out in my mind the strategy of how to get all the candles lit. My family would be proud. God would say “well done,” and I would do my part to ensure the world would be made right for another year.

The time finally arrived. The songs had been sung, the lights were down low, and the usher in the back handed me the book of matches along with his final instruction.

“Make sure to get all the candles lit,” he said.

“Yes sir,” I replied with confidence.

I had no intention of failing at the most important job I had ever been given in my life. Cool, calm and collected, I walked down the aisle while “Silent Night” played softly.

Everything felt right as I tore out the one match who would sacrifice itself for this task. I struck it on the pack with flawless precision. With the skill of a surgeon, I proceeded. Front candle - lit, left candle - lit, back candle - lit. By the time I got to the fourth candle, which was on the right, I heard that small voice in

my head forcefully whisper, “Ruston, we have a problem”. My dream job quickly turned into a nightmare as I realized the match was just about to set my finger ablaze, and the Christ Candle had been placed in the middle of the fiery furnace. Either I missed the directions or the usher failed to tell me that it was ok to use two matches. In an instant of clarity, I realized I was going to have to sacrifice my fingers to finish this mission.

Adrenaline kicked in, and time stood still as I calculated my options. Failure to light the Christ Candle might stop the world from spinning and the shame would be too much to bear. So with as much speed and courage as a young boy could manage, and knowing it was going to hurt, I raised my elbow to go over the top the burning ring of fire. Saying a quick prayer to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, I focused on the task at hand, smelling my own flesh as I focused on my target. I literally was “on fire for God!” As I lit the Christ Candle, its glow seemed equal to that of the Olympic flame coming alive to the shouts of praise of the angels in heaven.

In my mind I recall the majesty of that moment when the light of his flame caused my pain to disappear. As I finished my job and blew out my fingers, I made my way back to my seat doing my best not to cry or break the silence of this most special night.

Ruston Seaman is the president of New Vision Renewable Energy and the pastor of Peoples Chapel in Chestnut Ridge, W.V. Along with his wife, Donna, and children, Leah, and Ruston Ray, he loves finding ways to help make the world a better place.



Reflections:

- What in your life has “set you on fire for God,” or brings you great excitement?
- Share a time when you were doing something for God and it hurt.
- What is your first spiritual memory?

Activity: Spend the rest of the night counting your blessings and sharing how you appreciate the special moments in your life.

Featured Organization: www.nvre.org

Energy Poverty Fact: In Nepal, UC Berkeley researchers found the odds of having Tuberculosis were more than nine times greater for women using kerosene lamps for indoor lighting, rather than electricity.

Day 25

Lights for Christmas

Linda Biery

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. Revelation 22:5

WHILE WE WAIT for the great day when God will give us everlasting light, it seems right that we should try and do what we can.

My husband, Kent, is the director of Summer's Best Two Weeks Christian Group. We have the privilege of working with thousands of campers and hundreds of counselors. One of them was Erick Agoro Simba from a place called Kibera in Kenya. When I was asked by New Vision to join their team in Kenya, I thought I never expected to have a chance to go to Kenya, but what a great chance to see the community Simba had tried to tell me about. Before leaving, I wrote a song, "Light Your World," and set out to learn about what God might teach me.

Simba walked us through the roads and paths he had walked all his life. They were hard-packed mud with trash mixed in as dirt. Drainage from the rain washed trash and sewage wherever gravity pushed it. There were children running to fill their water jugs at a city pipe that had recently been broken – the only source of clean water since the city doesn't consider Kibera to be an official community. No official trash removal service, electricity, water or sewer is available to them. The walkways are lined with stands of coal and wood for cooking, and lots of local products – many of the redundant. Obviously, more supply than demand. It was a broken system, but the only one they know.

Crime is high and stench, as well as unpleasant circumstances of all kinds surround them. There is no walk in the park on a pretty day, or beauty of nature to behold. There is no privacy anywhere as the small huts are connected in rows. Yet, there were children playing, laughing and smiling at us, saying in English accents, "Hello, how are you?" from every direction. There was curiosity and hope in

their eyes. They could be born, live and die without ever leaving Kibera. They are hungry for good news and ready for a helping hand.

In the middle of this overwhelming community is a wonderful little school, St. Christine's, with beautiful children, and it was there I found hope as we sang, "This Little Light of Mine" in English and then Swahili.

I sensed that as tough as the conditions were, these children were stronger. I left with a prayer that these children would have bright futures as they study and play, as they take on challenges they face with the help of our Lord. As I left my visit, I began to see the smiling face of our Savior in the children of St. Christine's.

My prayer is for every child to wake up on Christmas morning and find the love of Christ in their hearts and a light to shine in the night.

Thanks for helping, and Merry Christmas!

Linda Biery grew up in a musical home in Minneapolis, Minn. After committing her life to Christ in 1992 at Summer's Best Two Weeks (a Christian sports camp in Pennsylvania), the Lord began inspiring music through her as a form of worship and ministry. Linda's first album, "The Seed", was recorded in 1997, and she and her husband, Kent Biery, began travelling and sharing their gifts together.



Reflections:

- Have you ever considered what a great gift we have in the infrastructure of our communities? Imagine your life without clean water, electricity, trash removal and sewer systems.

Activity: Listen to Linda's song, "Light Your World" found on New Vision's YouTube channel, and watch the families of Kenya receive light for the first time. Take time and give thanks for your blessings this Christmas Day.

Featured Organization: www.sb2w.org

Energy Poverty Fact: A single kerosene wick burns an estimated 80 liters of fuel, producing more than 250 kilograms of carbon dioxide per year. Multiply that across the developing world and kerosene lamps emit 270,000 tons of black carbon annually – equivalent to 240 million metric tons of CO₂.

The Candlemakers from Mathare

"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." Luke 8:39a

Life is precarious for the approximately 2 million people who live in Nairobi's informal settlements and slums. They make up over half the capital's population yet are crammed into only 5 percent of the city's residential area and just 1 percent of all land in the city. There are five informal settlements and slums residing in Nairobi, Kenya – Deep Sea, Kibera, Korogocho, Mukuru Kwa Njenga and Mathare.

New Vision proudly supports their partner located in the Kibera slum, the Kibera Youth Initiative for Community Development and its founder, Erick Agoro Simba. Born and raised in this slum, Simba experienced a lot of difficulties while growing up, but God had a special purpose for his life. He was able to get a scholarship and go to school, which changed his life. He knew that the only way that his life could change was through hard work, prayer and education, so he didn't take any chances with education.

Simba founded the Youth Initiative in 2008 and now creates opportunities for young adults, so they may have a better future and work their way out of the slum just like he did. In 2012, the Youth Initiative reached out to families and offered a way for them to earn New Vision solar lights for their homes by assisting with trash collection. It was a simple formula: the more trash collected, the more solar lights distributed.

This year, the Youth Initiative chose the Mathare Bondeni Recovery Group to create candles for the Christmas Lights Advent Devotional project. The Bondeni Group is composed of recovering drug and alcohol addicts – approximately 35 young men and 14 women who are engaged in different activities to try and improve their lifestyle through rehabilitation. They are very motivated young people who, in addition to the candle making program, support a counseling and food program, urban farming, community health and sports activities, and care for the children in their neighborhood. Many are learning new skill sets to find a means of supporting themselves.

God is doing something special in Bondeni. He's in the business of rescuing people from their self-destruction.

Week 1: Candle of Hope – Purple
Week 2: Candle of Preparation – Purple
Week 3: Candle of Joy – Pink
Week 4: Candle of Love – Purple
Week 5: Christ Candle – White

New Vision Light & Life Campaign

*In Memory of Seth Dorrell
September 10, 1980 - June 16, 2013*



"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16

In October, 25 solar-powered lights were purchased from the memorial fund set up in Seth Dorrell's name. Youth and adults, under the guidance of New Vision staff, built panels that will be installed in dark homes in Ferrier, Haiti, in the months ahead. Light will expel the physical darkness in the village because the Light that expels all darkness still reigns, even in death. (Read page 50 for a tribute written by Seth's dad, Jimmy.)



New Vision would like to help you honor your loved ones with light. If you would like to take part in our Light & Life Campaign to help light the world, please contact us at info@nvre.org or by calling 304-457-2971.

BRINGING THE *LIGHT* OF CHRIST
TO *FAMILIES* AROUND THE WORLD!



New Vision Renewable Energy
P.O. Box 425
Philippi, WV 26416
304-457-2971
www.nvre.org

Evangelical Environmental Network
P.O. Box 2791
Washington, DC 20013-2791
202-903-0209
www.creationcare.org