

# A SEASON OF HOPE

SMALL GROUP STUDY



**We miss community. We miss our neighbors. We miss gathering together.**  
**We all long for the hope that Christ will bring this Advent.**

Lutheran World Relief is inviting you to join us this Advent for a Season of Hope.

Gather some friends together virtually or in a safe, socially distanced way.

Spend an hour together each week to learn about your global neighbors, dig into a Bible study, and explore the powerful ways that you can connect your local neighbors to your global neighbors ... all from your own kitchen table.

This small group study will take you deeper into each of the regions around the world where your love reaches: Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. Each ready-to-use guide includes:

- a powerful video with discussion guide,
- an easy-to-use Bible study,
- a group prayer,
- and a way to put your love into action.



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## AFRICA | KENYA

### 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

#### **LEARN** How your love helps neighbors in Kenya

Located along the Indian Ocean on the eastern coast of Africa, Kenya is home to over 53 million people and some of the world's most exquisite wildlife. Kenya is bordered by the African countries of Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania. Swahili and English are widely spoken and serve as the country's official languages.

Since the early 1980s, you have been helping farming families in Kenya get more out of their land. You help farmers learn better ways to grow, process and store crops and, ultimately, increase the quantity and quality of their harvest. You help entire communities preserve and manage their natural resources in ways that improve their crop and livestock production. And you support farmer organizations to strengthen their technical and organizational capacities so that they can provide sustainable, equitable and quality services to their members.

In arid regions of Kenya, where drought is persistent and water is scarce, You provide farmers with drought-tolerant seeds and show them how to conserve and manage water for year-round irrigation.

#### **WATCH**

#### Meet Regina Mwangangi



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## DISCUSS

1. What did you notice when you saw the images of the Kenyan landscape?
2. Think of a time the weather altered your plans. What did that feel like? What do you imagine it would be like to farm in a hot, dry climate as you wait and pray for rain?
3. Despite the lack of rain and challenging conditions, Regina still gave thanks to God and could see how God had helped her and her family. Have you ever experienced someone with seemingly so little express gratitude for the gifts God has given? What is at the heart of that gratitude?

## BIBLE STUDY

In today's Bible reading from 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, the apostle Paul is writing to the young church in Corinth. Later in his letter he expresses a list of grievances he has with the budding church, but first he begins by giving thanks to God for them. Read together verses 4-5.

<sup>4</sup>I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>for in every way you have been enriched in Him, in speech and knowledge of every kind.

1. Paul began his letter by giving thanks to God for those who would receive it. How do you think that impacted the Corinthians' response to the rest of Paul's words?
2. How might your own difficult conversations be influenced if you gave thanks to God for the person you disagreed with before beginning the conversation?
3. In the midst of the challenges you have faced in 2020, for what can you give thanks to God?

## PRAY

Gracious God, giver of all things, we have so much to be thankful for. Thank you for being in the midst of the challenges of this past year. Guide us to focus on your Word as we look forward to the hope that Jesus brings. Help us to give thanks in all circumstances. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the One we long for in this season of hope.

**Amen.**

## SHARE YOUR LOVE

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**Until your love reaches every neighbor.**



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## ASIA | INDIA

### Isaiah 40:1-11

#### **LEARN** How your love helps neighbors in India

India, a country of approximately 1.3 billion people, is located in southern Asia and bordered by China, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar (Burma) and Bangladesh. The Himalayan mountains in northern India contain some of the highest mountains in the world. The official languages of India are Hindi and English, though it is reported that nearly 20,000 native languages are spoken throughout the country.

Lutheran World Relief has been working in India since the 1950s, and today operates in two of India's poorest states, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where farming is a primary means of income for families.

Your congregation's love makes solutions possible and reaches those with the very least, including Dalits, who are members of the lowest social class in the traditional Indian caste system.

In India, your love is at work alongside communities to help farmers replace decades-old farming methods with climate-smart, sustainable solutions, so they can grow nutritious foods — such as vegetables and pulses — and improve yields and quality to ultimately generate higher income.

Your commitment to loving your neighbor also helps rural communities better protect themselves from deadly natural disasters by helping communities develop lifesaving disaster risk management plans.

#### **WATCH**

#### Early Warning Saves Rajendra's Community



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## DISCUSS

1. What kind of weather warning systems do you have in place in your community? How do these systems bring you comfort?
2. Before Lutheran World Relief, Rajendra's community received no warning when the floodwaters were coming. In what ways can you imagine an early warning system has changed lives?
3. What are some of the innovative farming techniques you witnessed in Rajendra's community?
4. If you and/or your family lost everything in a flood, where would you turn for comfort and support?

## BIBLE STUDY

Today's Bible reading from Isaiah 40:1-11 is bookended with words that offer a vision of a caring and compassionate God. Read together v1 and v11.

<sup>1</sup>Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

<sup>11</sup>[The Lord God] will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

1. Theologian Walter Brueggemann describes God's comfort not simply as an offer of solace, but as a "powerful intervention that creates new possibilities." Does this

description of God's comfort resonate with you? Why or why not? If possible, use examples from life when God's comfort has created new possibilities for you.

2. Isaiah 40:11 describes four ways that God comforts God's people. Identify each of the four ways. Which image of God brings you the most comfort? Why?
3. Do you think Rajendra and his family experienced God's comfort ?

## PRAY

God of all creation, you draw near to us like that of a shepherd feeding his flock. Gather all people into your arms, especially our neighbors at risk along the border of India and Nepal. Create new possibilities that promise a hope-filled future. Provide safety through early warning systems, feed the hungry with bountiful harvests and comfort all who fear natural disasters in our world. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the One we long for in this season of hope. **Amen.**

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## MIDDLE EAST | LEBANON

### Isaiah 61:1-11

#### **LEARN** How your love helps neighbors in Lebanon

Located in the Middle East along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon shares a border with both Israel and Syria. With a population of nearly 7 million people, Lebanon is about four-fifths the size of Connecticut. Arabic is the official language of the country, with French and English considered secondary languages.

Lebanon is host to the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. As refugees struggle to establish a new life and source of income, many poor Lebanese families are also facing hardships finding employment.

Your congregation's love reaches Syrian refugees and poor Lebanese families with specialized agricultural training and employment opportunities, including an opportunity for women and men to learn how to produce crops in greenhouses, extending the growing season. Their crops will become their source of income and provide much-needed nourishing food for their communities. Your support also repairs and improves irrigation canals and water networks and helps these stressed local and refugee communities learn to work together.

Additionally, the quilts and care kits you so lovingly assemble are reaching desperate refugees who seek shelter in Lebanon. These essential supplies allow people to allocate their very limited resources to things like food, medicine, and shelter. They also provide a spot of color and softness in what can be a grim, hard existence.

On August 4, 2020, one of the largest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded sent a blast through the capital city of Beirut. More than 180 people were killed and an estimated 300,000 are currently displaced. Your swift and generous response meant that Lutheran World Relief could rush aid to our neighbors in Beirut. Right now, you are helping to meet basic needs through food distributions, home and business repairs and through distribution of quilts and kits.

Thank you for reaching neighbors in Lebanon with gifts of light and hope.

#### **WATCH**

*LWR's disaster response in Beirut is ongoing. An updated video showing your love reaching our neighbors in Beirut will be available to view by December 6. An updated version of this resource will be posted as soon as the video is available."*

For the most recent information about Lutheran World Relief's response to the disaster in Lebanon, visit [lwr.org/news](https://lwr.org/news).

#### **DISCUSS**

1. What challenges faced by our neighbors in Beirut stood out to you the most? Why?
2. Imagine what it would be like to be a refugee. What do you think would be most difficult about being in that situation?
3. Where in the video did you notice hope?
4. What could you do from home to help our neighbors in Lebanon?

## BIBLE STUDY

Some of God's most extravagant work is described in today's Bible reading from Isaiah 61:1-11. Read together verses 1-4.

<sup>1</sup>The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;

<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

<sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion — to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. <sup>4</sup>They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

1. How might you summarize what God is saying through the prophet Isaiah in these four verses?
2. Do any of the words in these verses call to mind anything you have learned about our neighbors in Lebanon? What connections can you draw?
3. There are a lot of pairs of opposite words in these verses — release of prisoners, comfort and mourning, rising up and repairing ruined cities. Discuss contrasting

ideas you notice in the Bible reading. Do you also notice contrasts in what you have read about and watched in the video regarding the situation in Lebanon today?

## PRAY

Dear God, thank you for bringing your light and love into the world through Jesus. Be with our neighbors in Lebanon who are afraid or alone. Bring them comfort and hope. Thank you for inviting us to be part of bringing your good news into the world. Guide us to find ways to share the love you give us with our neighbors here at home and in faraway places like Lebanon. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the One we long for in this season of hope. **Amen.**

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# LATIN AMERICA | PERU

## 2 Samuel 7:1-16

### LEARN How your love helps neighbors in Peru

Peru is located in western South America, along the coast of the Pacific Ocean and shares a border with Bolivia, Brazil, Chili, Colombia and Ecuador. Nearly a third of the country's 32 million people live in the metro area of Lima, Peru's capitol city. Spanish is widely spoken throughout Peru, though the country is also home to more than 90 native languages.

Since 1979, your love has been at work in Peru, reaching poor, rural families who depend on the land to survive. These are families that often have no running water or electricity to their homes.

Putting your congregation's love to work in Peru means farming families learn to grow more and better quality crops that sell for a higher price, so they can support themselves and create more opportunity for their children.

And your love is reaching desperate refugees who are finding safe haven in Peru. Millions of people are fleeing Venezuela amid a crippling economic and political crisis. The crisis is so severe that a month's salary can't even buy a day's worth of food. You are providing food, shelter and help with the immigration process to Venezuelan families streaming into Peru.



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### WATCH

#### FAMILIES FLEEING TURMOIL IN VENEZUELA REESTABLISH THEIR LIVES IN PERU



### DISCUSS

1. Betzaida's family was a working-class family in Venezuela before they had to leave their home. What do you think it was like leaving their home because they did not have access to medicine?
2. If you had to leave your home, not knowing if you would ever come back, what are three things you would make sure to take with you? Why?
3. Betzaida's family walked for 37 days to find a safe place to seek refuge. Recall a scary period in your life. Did your faith help you through? How?

4. Sadly, there are many more families like Betzaida's who are fleeing Venezuela right now seeking refuge in Peru. Lutheran World Relief is there to welcome them. How can you get involved in helping your neighbors like Betzaida, even from far away?

#### BIBLE STUDY

Today's Bible reading from 2 Samuel reminds us that God is with us wherever we go. Read 2 Samuel 7:10-11 together.

<sup>10</sup>And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup>from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.

1. In the reading from 2 Samuel, David experiences God's gift of home. What attributes of this home are described in the Bible reading?
2. Stories of God's people living in exile and without a home to call their own are common in scripture. How might this experience be similar to that of the Venezuelan refugees seeking refuge in Peru? How might it be different?

3. David's house is no longer with us, but God made known in the Holy Spirit remains with us always. Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in your congregation?

#### PRAY

Gracious and holy God, amid all the turmoil and changes of the world your love is steadfast and your strength never fails. Lead us from despair to hope and from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love and from war to peace. Fill our world with peace and make a safe place for all who seek refuge, especially our neighbors searching for a new and just home in Peru. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the One we long for in this season of hope. **Amen.**

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