AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Light in the Darkness



Scripture, reflection & prayer for hard seasons

HOPE LIFE GLOBAL

VICKI DOMINGUEZ

Light in the Darkness

An Advent Devotional for Hard Seasons

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A Letter Before We Begin



Dear friend,

I wish you were sitting at my kitchen table right now. I'd put the kettle on and ask whether you'd like tea or coffee, then bring out all the fixings and cut you a slice of warm bread. We'd settle in, and somewhere between the first cup and the second, I hope you'd feel free to tell me what's really on your heart. I'd listen, and then we'd pray together.

I'm Vicki, a wife, a mama of eight, and a grandmother who still can't believe how blessed she is. Ruben and I raised our eight children together, and I had the joy of homeschooling every one of them. For fifteen years we called the Dominican Republic

home, serving on the mission field. I still cry over people I met there years ago, and I still laugh loudest when my whole family is in one place. Both the tears and the laughter have found their way into this little book. Some of the stories belong to women and children I love dearly, so I've kept their names and private details safe in their own keeping.

Advent means "coming." Christians spend these weeks remembering how Jesus came into an ordinary family and looking forward to His coming again. You can walk these pages with me even if you've never been to the Dominican Republic. Come up a mountain trail, sit in a classroom in Santiago with me, and pray with us on the streets of Sosúa. Bring your own people with you in your heart. Jesus loves them, too.

With love from my table to yours,

Vicki Dominguez

How to Use This Devotional

Each day has a few simple parts. Find ten quiet minutes with your morning coffee, or gather your family around the dinner table.

- **Scripture:** a short passage to read slowly, maybe twice.
- **Reflection:** a word about hard seasons and how God meets us there, often through a story from our work.
- **Prayer:** a prayer you can pray as your own.
- **Light for Today:** one small step to carry the light into your day.

On Sundays you'll begin by lighting the Advent candle and close with a Family Moment to share together. On Saturdays you'll end the week with a few reflection questions to look back on how God met you.

The Advent Wreath

On each Sunday you will find a short candle-lighting time for your home, small group, or church. You need a wreath or a simple circle of five candles: three purple, one pink, and one white candle in the center.

- **First Sunday of Advent:** First purple candle (Hope)

- **Second Sunday of Advent:** Second purple candle (Peace)
- **Third Sunday of Advent:** Pink candle (Joy)
- **Fourth Sunday of Advent:** Third purple candle (Love)
- **Christmas Eve and Christmas Day:** White Christ Candle (Jesus, the Light of the World)

Each week, relight the candles from the weeks before, then light the new one. By Christmas the whole circle will be glowing, a picture of how His light grows brighter the longer we walk with Him.

You can use this devotional every year. Advent always begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, so its length changes from year to year. Weeks One through Three always have all seven days. In Week Four, read each day in order until you reach December 24, then turn to Christmas Eve. Some years you will use every Week Four reading, and some years only a few.

I

Week One: Hope

I have learned that hope gives me room to grieve what is and still trust God for what He has promised. On the hardest days, my hope rests in what I know of His character.

1

First Sunday of Advent: The Candle of Hope



Lighting the Candle

Reader: *Today we light the first purple candle, the Candle of Hope. It reminds us that God promised a Savior long before He came, and*

God keeps His promises.

All: *Lord Jesus, You are our hope. Shine in every dark place. Light the first purple candle.*

Scripture

> *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." — Isaiah 9:2*

Reflection

The first time you visit a church, you probably look for the door. I smile when I think of the directions Ruben and I would have given you in Juan López, a community in Moca in the Dominican Republic. Look for the mango tree. That was where we gathered. I love that an ordinary tree gets to be part of our family's history with God.

Isaiah speaks of people who were still walking in darkness when they saw a great light. That little word "walking" matters to me. We rarely get to see, at the beginning, what our work or our prayers will mean fifteen years later. We get enough light to recognize the people beside us. Under that tree, we could see each other's faces.

Maybe all you can see this Advent is your own kitchen and the person sitting across from you. If we were having tea there today, I'd ask who first made room for you in their circle. I can think of no lovelier way to light our first candle than to remember them by name.

Prayer

Father, You see the dark places in my life that I hide from others. Thank You that You do not wait for me to climb out before You come near. Shine Your light on me this Advent. Let hope rise again in my heart, and let me carry that light to someone else. In Jesus' name, amen.

Family Moment

Turn off every light in the room and sit in the dark for one minute. Then light the candle together. Talk about how even one small flame changes the whole room.

2

Monday — New Every Morning



Scripture

> *"It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." — Lamentations*

3:22–23

Reflection

Come up the mountain trail with me for a minute. We were carrying food to a hungry family. On a steep stretch you look down to see where to put your foot, and for a little while your whole world becomes the weight in your arms and the next few feet of ground. Then you look up. There are homes up there. Families made that climb every day, even on the days there was nothing to carry home for supper.

Cooking for my family has always been one of my favorite ways to love them. I know the joy of a full pot on the stove and eight hungry children crowding into the kitchen, asking when supper will be ready. So on that trail, my heart broke. I kept picturing a mother just like me, opening her cupboard to find it empty while her children watched her face, waiting. I could not imagine looking into my own children's eyes with nothing to give them. Seeing families I loved go hungry was one of the hardest things I have ever carried, harder than any bag of rice on that mountain. Even now, years later, when I stand at my stove stirring a pot for my grandchildren, I stop and whisper a prayer for the mothers on that mountain.

Lamentations speaks of mercy arriving each morning. When we fed children, yesterday's meal mattered, and the next morning mattered just as much. I still think about the children who shared those meals. When I pray about the years ahead, I picture setting extra places at that table.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the meals we shared with children and the hands that prepared them. Remember the families we love. Give us more mornings when we can welcome children to breakfast. Show me who needs a little of Your mercy at my own table today. Amen.

Light for Today: Write down three ways God showed you mercy this morning.

3

Tuesday — Love Letters in the Dark



Scripture

> *"The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." — Psalm 34:18*

Reflection

Come walk with us in Sosúa, a town in Puerto Plata. In our hands are bags with soap, lotion, toothpaste, and a letter about the love of Jesus. On a street where men come expecting something from a woman, we hold out a gift that asks for nothing in return. Can she take this and owe us nothing? Yes. She can. The bag is hers.

We have prayed with women there. When a woman welcomes prayer, there are words I want her to hear above the street noise. That her life is precious to God. That no one who ever paid for her time could set her worth. Only God can, and He calls her His own. The ache I bring home is knowing that I can leave that street when our evening is over. She may have to stay.

Psalm 34 says the Lord is near to the brokenhearted. If we were walking back together, I think I'd ask you to say one more prayer with me. *Jesus, stay close to her through the part of the night we will never see.*

Prayer

Jesus, You came close to the broken and the shamed. Come close to me in the places I feel unworthy. And tonight, draw near to every woman on the streets of Sosúa. Let Your love letter reach her heart. Amen.

Light for Today: Write a short note of encouragement to someone who is struggling, and send it today.

4

Wednesday — Freedom for the Captives



Parents: today's reflection speaks about children who have been exploited. You may want to read it ahead of time or share it in your own words with younger children.

Scripture

> *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." — Isaiah 61:1*

Reflection

Come with me, in your mind, as far as the doorway of a brothel. Girls have been rescued from places like this. As a grandmother I get caught on one word. Girls.

Inside that doorway was a child. A child young enough to need an adult to remember her birthday, take her growing pains seriously, or leave a light on for her. Somewhere, an adult took advantage of the very fact that she needed care. I feel angry about that. I feel grief, too. Her private memories are hers to tell if she ever chooses.

When Jesus read Isaiah's promise of freedom, He said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). He came to bring real freedom to real people. That shapes my prayer for a restoration home. I want a girl to have a door she can close, adults who keep their word, and time to discover what she likes for breakfast. Imagine the grace of finally being allowed to simply be a child.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Chain-Breaker. Set free every child held in darkness tonight. Give strength to those who rescue them.

And show me any chains I am still carrying, so I can hand them to You. Amen.

Light for Today: Pray by name for one person you know who is bound by something they cannot break alone.

5

Thursday — Thoughts of Peace Toward You



Scripture

> *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you*

an expected end." — Jeremiah 29:11

Reflection

One of the things homeschooling taught me was how quickly a mother can hear a child stumble over a word and start worrying about the next ten years. The child is on page three. In my head I'm already at graduation. Eight children gave the Lord plenty of chances to teach me to come back to page three.

Jeremiah wrote to God's people living as exiles in Babylon, far from home, who would wait years for the future they longed for. His letter gave them something to do in the meantime. Build homes. Plant gardens. Care for the place where you are. I think of students we have known in the Dominican Republic who once needed shoes for school and went on to college. Think of all the ordinary days between those two things.

Who are you already worrying about ten years from now? Tonight I'm asking Jesus to help me love the person in front of me at the age they are right now. Maybe what they need today is someone delighted to hear them finish page three.

Prayer

Father, I do not always understand Your plans, but I trust Your heart. Thank You for every student who now has a future because You opened doors. Open doors for me too, and help me wait well. Amen.

Light for Today: Encourage a young person in your life about their future. Tell them one strength you see in them.

6

Friday — Hope That Does Not Disappoint



Scripture

> *"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, ex-*

perience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." — *Romans 5:3–5*

Reflection

Pull a chair up beside mine in the classroom where we taught in Cienfuegos, a neighborhood in Santiago. Picture an open workbook between you and a child who is hurting. If you have helped with homework at your own kitchen table, you know the temptation to point at the next question and get things moving. Sometimes the kindest thing a grown-up can do is put the pencil down first.

When we worked with children there, the getting-to-know-you part mattered as much to me as the lesson. A child can spend so much energy carrying a worry that there is little left for reading. I know how tender it feels, even as a grandmother, when someone notices I have gone quiet and gives me time to answer.

Paul traces the slow growth of hope through endurance. That is my prayer for every child we'll have the privilege of teaching in the years ahead. May there be someone beside them who remembers how much courage it took to try the first time.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, pour God's love into my heart today. Where I am struggling, build patience. Where I am weak, build a faith that has been tested and proven true. And let it all end in hope. Amen.

Light for Today: Think of a past hardship that made you

stronger. Thank God for what He built in you through it.

7

Saturday — An Anchor for the Soul



Scripture

> *"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast." — Hebrews 6:19*

Reflection

Some people will tell you everything is fine and then ask if they can have one more cup of tea. I have tea sets all over the place, so that is an easy yes in my house. It's often during that second cup, after the polite conversation has run its course, that you find out why they came.

I understand the person asking for another cup. After fifteen years on the mission field, I can speak to a whole church and still find it hard to tell one dear friend that I am discouraged. One of the sweetest gifts visiting teams give Ruben and me is the chance to simply be ourselves. They ask about our family. They pray for us. It means more than I can say to hear someone else carry our names to God.

Hebrews calls hope an anchor for the soul. Sometimes God holds us steady through a friend who stays long enough for us to tell the truth. Who has been that friend for you? Put the kettle on for them this week, or be that friend for someone else.

Prayer

Lord, You are my anchor. When the waves rise this season, hold me steady. Let my hope be in You, not in my circumstances. Amen.

Reflection Questions

- What storm am I facing this Advent?
- How has God held me steady before?
- Who needs me to be a steady presence for them this month?

II

Week Two: Peace

The peace of Jesus is not the absence of trouble. It is His presence in the middle of it.

8

Second Sunday of Advent: The Candle of Peace



Lighting the Candle

Reader: *Last week we lit the Candle of Hope. (Relight the first candle.) Today we light the second purple candle, the Candle of*

Peace. Jesus came as the Prince of Peace, to make peace between us and God and to bring peace into troubled hearts and homes.

All: *Prince of Peace, calm our hearts. Make us peacemakers in a hurting world.*

Light the second purple candle.

Scripture

> *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." — Isaiah 9:6*

Reflection

Hope Mountain, in Lajas de Yaroa, is home. It is also where refugees have found homes. When I say "home," I think about the people who know where I keep the cups and feel free to help themselves. Imagine leaving the country where you knew all those little things and having to ask somebody how to do almost everything again.

When I read that Joseph carried his family away to Egypt to keep Jesus safe, my grandmother's heart goes straight to Mary. Mary held that baby close while Joseph figured out where to go. The Prince of Peace knew the arms of a family fleeing danger before He was old enough to remember the journey.

If someone new comes to your church this Christmas, show them where the coffee is and learn how they like it. Then tell them where you'll be sitting next Sunday. Being expected a second time is one of the first steps toward feeling at home.

Prayer

Prince of Peace, You carried the burden of the world on Your shoulders so I would not have to carry it alone. Bring Your peace to every refugee family tonight, and to every unsettled place in my heart. Make me someone who makes others feel they belong. Amen.

Family Moment

Talk together about a time you felt like you did not belong. Then think of someone at school, work, or church who might feel that way now. How can your family welcome them this week?

9

Monday — Not as the World Gives



Scripture

> *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” — John 14:27*

Reflection

There's a particular kind of listening a mother does when the doctor starts explaining what her child needs. She wants to catch every word. Meanwhile another question has started up in her head. How are we going to pay for this? I know any parent reading this will recognize that divided attention.

We've helped families with medical bills in the Dominican Republic. I think about what it means when a mother learns that her child's surgery is covered. The surgery still lies ahead. But now she gets to use both hands to hold her child instead of keeping one on the calculator. I would want someone to do that for one of my daughters if she were the mother beside that bed.

Jesus gave His friends peace on the night before the cross. This Advent, one way to share His peace might be to ask a worried parent which piece of tomorrow you could carry for them today.

Prayer

Jesus, I give You my troubled heart. Where I am afraid about my health, my family, or my finances, give me Your peace. Heal the sick who cannot afford care, and use me to be part of the answer. Amen.

Light for Today: Call or visit someone who is sick or recovering. Ask how you can pray for them.

10

Tuesday — Provision on the Mountain



Scripture

> *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all*

understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." — Philippians 4:6–7

Reflection

Baking bread gives me time to think about what goes into feeding a family. Flour dust makes it remarkably easy to tell which grandchild has been helping, even if nobody volunteers the information.

On Hope Mountain I can trace a meal back farther than the kitchen counter. There are animals to care for and work to do long before anyone bows a head over supper. When I say grace, I want to remember the people whose backs and hands went into the food cooling in front of me.

"Be careful for nothing" is the old way of saying, "Don't be anxious about anything." Paul invites us to bring God our worries with thanksgiving. If money is tight this week, God can hear the grace you say over one loaf and the worry you feel over the next one. You can tell Him both things while the bread is warm.

Prayer

Father, You are my provider. I bring You my worries about *(name your need)*. Thank You for every way You have already taken care of me. Guard my heart with Your peace. Amen.

Light for Today: Share something you have with someone in need: a meal, a gift card, or your time.

11

Wednesday — Rest for the Weary



Scripture

> *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” — Matthew 11:28*

Reflection

At my house you can usually find a teapot before you find me. Give me a few minutes and I'll have something warm in your hands. Then I'll want to know how you really are.

People have come up to Hope Mountain needing that kind of rest. Some came needing restoration after something precious in their lives had come apart. I feel other people's pain deeply, and my temptation is to fill the quiet because I so badly want to make things better. Fifteen years on the mission field taught me how much love it can take to leave the quiet alone.

When Jesus says, "Come unto me," the tired person has only one thing to do. Come. If all you could manage at my table today was to warm your hands around the cup, I would be glad you came. I believe Jesus would be, too.

Prayer

Jesus, I am tired. I accept Your invitation. I lay down my burdens at Your feet. Give me the rest that only You can give, and restore what has been broken in me. Amen.

Light for Today: Take fifteen minutes today to be completely still. No phone, no list. Just rest in His presence.

12

Thursday — Peace in Our Relationships



Scripture

> *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." — Isaiah 26:3*

Reflection

You learn a humbling thing when you homeschool all eight of your children. They are present for the lesson you planned and for the way you speak when somebody spills a drink in the middle of it. I would dearly love to teach a few of those afternoons over again.

In our work with young people through HOPE USA, we talk about respect in relationships. One way a young person learns what respect sounds like is by hearing a grown-up say, "I answered you too sharply. Would you tell me again?" There's a little risk in saying that. The child may tell you exactly how it felt. Love stays to hear the answer.

Isaiah connects peace to a mind that keeps turning toward God. Sometimes the fruit of that quiet turning is a very ordinary walk back down the hall to knock on the door of somebody you love.

Prayer

Lord, bring Your peace to my relationships. Heal what is broken. Give me wisdom in how I love others. And protect the young people in every nation, that they would know their worth in You. Amen.

Light for Today: Reach out to someone you have had tension with and take one step toward peace.

13

Friday — Peace on Earth



Scripture

> *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” — Luke 2:14*

Reflection

We're building a new church in Luperón. If you drove through that small community today, you could see a church taking shape. What I wish you could see as clearly is what it means to have neighbors put down roots and say, by the work of their hands, that they intend to be here for one another.

That is how this village is getting to know hope. A building gives people a place they can point to when a family needs prayer or a lonely neighbor wants somewhere to go on Sunday. I think of the churches in the Santo Domingo area that are already that familiar place for their neighbors. It takes years of people showing up for one another to make a room feel like that.

The angels sang peace on earth to shepherds who could go and see for themselves. Pray for the people building in Luperón, and for the first neighbor who finds the courage to walk through the door.

Prayer

Glory to You, God, in the highest! Thank You for every new church planted in a place that had none. Raise up more pastors and leaders. And let Your peace fill the forgotten corners of my life. Amen.

Light for Today: Pray for your own pastor today, and send them a note of thanks.

14

Saturday — Be Still



Scripture

> *"Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." — Psalm 46:10*

Reflection

At the end of a mission trip, it's easy to ask what got done. There's another question I like even more. Whose face comes to mind when you close your eyes? It might be a local leader who explained why the community needed a particular job done. It might be the teammate who quietly stayed to put everything away.

Psalm 46 invites us to be still long enough to remember whose work this is. Our Dominican neighbors have gifts to share with visitors. A team that listens before it picks up its tools honors those gifts. And when visitors shoulder the work our communities ask them to do, our local leaders get the encouragement of knowing somebody will work beside them.

Try that at home before you ever pack a suitcase. Ask someone who has done a job for years what would genuinely help them tomorrow. Give them time to surprise you with the answer.

Prayer

Lord, I choose to be still. You are God, and I am not. Be exalted in my life, and be exalted in Jamaica, in Eswatini, and in every nation. Prepare the hearts of the people our teams will meet. Amen.

Reflection Questions

- What is stealing my peace this season?
- What would it look like to trust God with it today?
- How can I pray for the mission teams going to Jamaica and Eswatini?

III

Week Three: Joy

Joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness depends on what happens. Joy depends on who is with us.

15

Third Sunday of Advent: The Candle of Joy



Lighting the Candle

Reader: *We have lit the Candles of Hope and Peace. (Relight the first two candles.) Today we light the pink candle, the Candle of Joy. It*

is a different color because joy breaks into the waiting. The angels told the shepherds, "I bring you good tidings of great joy."

All: *Lord, fill us with Your joy, even in sorrow. Let our lives announce good news.*

Light the pink candle.

Scripture

> *"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." — Luke 2:10–11*

Reflection

Every year at our Christmas celebration, everybody in the room gets a gift. If you are the one who is usually still in the kitchen when the gifts are handed out, hear me: yes, you too. There's one for you.

We eat a wonderful meal. We sing, and we hear the Christmas story told in a way that reaches into the year we've actually lived. The angel told shepherds the good news was for all people. Those words land a little differently with a gift in your lap and the neighbor who served your supper opening one beside you.

If you have ever been the grown-up who wrapped every present under the tree and was startled to find your own name on one, you understand why this tradition matters to me. What a tender thing it is to be remembered.

Prayer

Savior, thank You for the good news of great joy. When I am discouraged, remind me of what You have done. Let my life tell Your story, so others can catch Your joy too. Amen.

Family Moment

Go around the table and have each person share one thing God has done for them this year. Celebrate each one.

16

Monday — Joy Comes in the Morning



Scripture

> *“For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” — Psalm 30:5*

Reflection

I can be folding laundry, minding my own business, when a child's face from years ago comes back to me. I wonder how tall that child is now. Whether school got easier. Whether somebody remembered a birthday. Then I'm standing there holding a towel with tears on my face. That's what it is like for me to love people. They come home with me in ways they'll never know.

You probably carry somebody that way, too. A grandchild who lives far away. The friend whose last phone call ended too soon. I love that the psalmist lets weeping have a whole night. There's no instruction to tidy yourself up before God comes near.

Sometimes joy in the morning is as small as hearing a beloved voice on the phone say your name. If someone came to mind while you read this, maybe today you could be that voice for them.

Prayer

Lord, You see my tears. Thank You that You do not rush me. Hold me through this night, and let me see the morning of Your joy. Amen.

Light for Today: Sit with someone who is grieving this Christmas. You do not need the right words. Just be there.

17

Tuesday — The Joy of the Lord Is Your Strength



Scripture

> *“Neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” — Nehemiah 8:10*

Reflection

One blessing of having a mission team come is seeing a familiar week through somebody else's eyes. Work we have been doing for years suddenly matters enough for a person to take their vacation, get on a plane, and ask our local leaders where an extra pair of hands would help. Can I tell you what that does for my heart? It gives me the courage to get up and do the work again when they've gone home.

Our communities receive something, too. Each job a visitor takes on alongside a neighbor is a chance for two people who might never have met to get to know one another. By the time you pass the food at supper, you know something about the hands taking the plate.

Nehemiah told a weary people to eat together and send a portion to someone who needed one. If you're thinking of coming on a trip, there is a place beside us for somebody who knows how to share the work and pass the plate.

Prayer

Lord, I feel weak, but I receive Your joy as my strength today. Raise up young leaders in the DR and in my own community. Give them courage, wisdom, and joy for the work ahead. Amen.

Light for Today: Encourage a young leader in your church. Tell them you see God working through them.

18

Wednesday — Sowing in Tears



Scripture

> *"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with*

him." — Psalm 126:5–6

Reflection

If you have ever planted something with a small child, you know the urge to dig it up the next morning and check. I understand that impulse a little too well. When we poured time into a child in Santiago, I wanted to know how the story would turn out. The harder part of loving someone is that you seldom get to read ahead.

The psalm pictures a person walking out to sow while weeping. Seed was precious. Once it left the sower's hand, there would be a stretch of bare ground that looked exactly as it did before. Some of you know that stretch. You have prayed for an adult child for years. You still set a place when there's a chance they might come.

I find comfort in remembering the mango tree in Juan López. Ruben and I got to gather with people under shade we didn't have to wait to grow. May somebody else rest one day under what you are planting now.

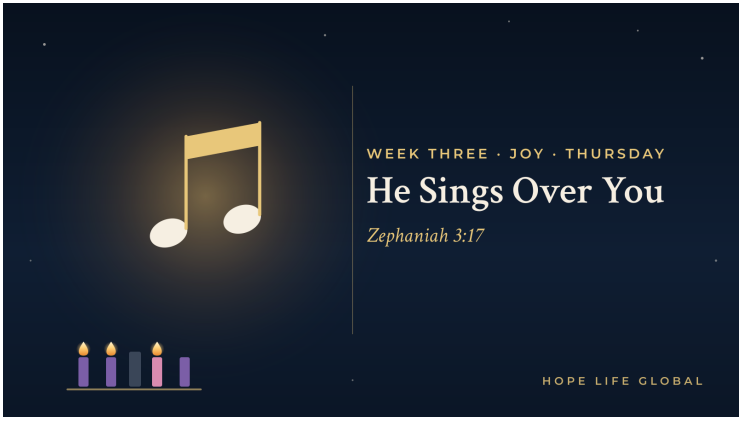
Prayer

Lord of the harvest, I bring You the seeds I am planting in tears. Let them grow. Go before our team to Jamaica. Prepare the soil of every heart they will meet, and bring a harvest of joy. Amen.

Light for Today: Do one faithful thing today that no one will see but God.

19

Thursday — He Sings Over You



Scripture

> *"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."* — *Zephaniah*

3:17

Reflection

There's a wound a woman can carry long after somebody has walked away. It's the fear that if the next person knew what had been done to her, they would look at her differently, too. I think about that in Sosúa. I think about the extra hurt a careless look from a Christian could cause.

When we hand out bags and pray with women there, I want my face to agree with the words of love in the letter. I want the woman in front of me to have the freedom to speak, to be quiet, or to take the bag and go. She has already had too many choices taken from her.

Zephaniah says God sings over us. Imagine feeling safe enough to close your eyes and simply listen.

Prayer

Father, it is hard for me to believe that You rejoice over me. Help me hear Your song. Calm my anxious heart in Your love. And let every woman in Sosúa know that You sing over her. Amen.

Light for Today: Play a worship song and simply listen, imagining God singing it over you.

20

Friday — Yet I Will Rejoice



Scripture

> *"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from*

the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation."
— Habakkuk 3:17–18

Reflection

One of my Christmas prayers begins with a memory of children eating and learning together in Santiago. I ask the Lord to let more children know that kind of welcome.

Habakkuk names the things missing from his fields, and I appreciate his honesty. I can name what is missing, too. Having taught children, I can remember the sound of a whole room trying to tell me something at once. Funny how the very noise I used to quiet is the sound I treasure now.

His word "yet" gives me somewhere to stand. I can give thanks for those voices, ask God to bring more children to our table, and give thanks for each person in Cienfuegos who still cares what happens to them. If there is an unfinished prayer in your house this Christmas, you can bring it to supper and say grace anyway.

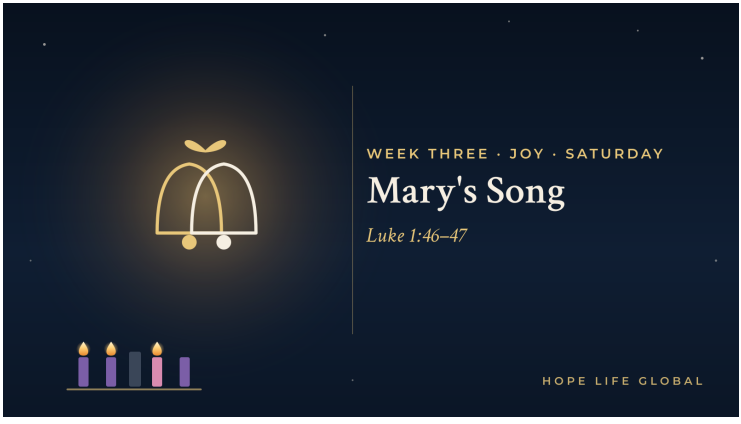
Prayer

God of my salvation, even if nothing goes the way I hoped this season, I choose to rejoice in You. You are enough. Be my joy when everything else fails. Amen.

Light for Today: Write your own "yet" statement: "Even though _____, yet I will rejoice in the Lord."

21

Saturday — Mary’s Song



Scripture

> *“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” — Luke 1:46–47*

Reflection

Most Christmases the Dominican side of our family comes to Hope Mountain. We roast a pig we raised and bring out all the Dominican fixings. I love to cook for these people. Somewhere in the eating and talking, the games come out. Then somebody starts karaoke. You find out pretty quickly that knowing the chorus and knowing the whole song are two different spiritual gifts.

These are my people. We laugh, and we pray for each other about things we've carried all year. Sometimes I look around the table while somebody is praying and think, *Lord, please let me remember us just like this.*

Mary sang about a God who fills hungry people with good things. I hear that verse differently with a full table in front of me. I want my grandchildren to remember the taste of Christmas at home and to grow up asking who else might like to come for supper.

Prayer

Lord, my soul magnifies You. You have done great things for me. Thank You for lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry. Let my life be a song of praise. Amen.

Reflection Questions

- Where have I found joy this week, even in a hard moment?
- What great things has God done for me this year?
- Who can I share my joy with before Christmas?

IV

Week Four: Love

Christmas is God's love wrapped in skin. He did not send a message. He came Himself.

22

Fourth Sunday of Advent: The Candle of Love



Lighting the Candle

Reader: *We have lit the Candles of Hope, Peace, and Joy. (Relight the first three candles.) Today we light the last purple candle, the*

Candle of Love. God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son.

All: *Father, thank You for loving us first. Teach us to love the way You love.*

Light the third purple candle.

Scripture

> *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." — John 3:16*

Reflection

I don't know how to love "the world" all at once. I know how to love a particular person. I can remember how they take their coffee. I can learn which subject their child finds hard. I can make enough bread to send a loaf home. Those small particulars help me understand the size of what John is saying when he tells us God loved the world.

In Ensanche Gómez, a neighborhood of Santiago, the people our church knows by name are somebody's whole world. So are the neighbors our friends love in Jamaica and Eswatini. Fifteen years of living across cultures made the word "neighbor" feel wonderfully crowded to me. Start with one person you know well enough to make their coffee. Imagine how tenderly God knows the person across the world whose name you have yet to learn.

Prayer

Father, thank You for loving the whole world, and for loving me. Send Your love through us to Eswatini, to Jamaica, to the Dominican Republic, and to my own neighborhood. Let everyone we meet know they are loved by You. Amen.

Family Moment

Find Eswatini, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic on a map together. Pray for the children and families in each country, and ask God to show your family how to love the world.

23

Monday — The Longest Night



Scripture

> *"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other*

creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." — Romans 8:38–39

Reflection

Christmas can undo you in the grocery store. You pass the ingredient somebody in your family always used, reach for it out of habit, and remember who won't be at the table. All around you people are comparing prices and trying to get past your cart. For a minute you're in another Christmas altogether.

Nothing matters more to me in this life than family. Maybe that's why Romans 8 moves me most when Paul gets to the word death. He has the courage to name the separation that frightens me and say that even there, the love of Christ will hold.

If grief is following you down the aisles this year, I wish I could bring you home for tea. I'd ask how your person made that dish. I'd love to hear the part that never made it onto the recipe card. You could take all afternoon telling me.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, this season is hard for me. I miss *(name)*. I feel *(name your feeling)*. Thank You that nothing, not even this grief, can separate me from Your love. Stay with me through this longest night. Amen.

Light for Today: Light a candle in memory of someone you miss, and thank God for the gift they were.

24

Tuesday — Love in Action



Scripture

> *"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." — 1 John 3:18*

Reflection

When we cooked for the children, someone had to buy the rice, tend the pot, pass the plates, and stay to wash up. By the end of lunch there might be very little to show somebody who walked in late. The food was gone. That was the point. A child got to spend the afternoon thinking about something besides an empty stomach.

John asks us to love in deed and truth. So here is the truth I want the people who gave toward those meals to hear. Your gifts helped us feed those children. My hope is that we'll get to know the next generation around a table like that one.

I remember what happened around those tables besides eating. Children were known. Somebody noticed an absence. There was time for one more question. Thank you for loving the children in those ordinary, necessary ways. I hope one day to write and tell you there are dishes to wash again.

Prayer

Lord, let my love be more than words. Show me one practical way to love someone today. Bless every donor and prayer partner who has made this ministry possible, and multiply every gift for Your glory. Amen.

Light for Today: Do one practical act of love today for someone who cannot repay you.

25

Wednesday — Called by Name



Scripture

> *"Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers,*

they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." — Isaiah 43:1–2

Reflection

After eight children, I have occasionally started with one child's name and worked my way down the family before getting to the one standing in front of me. Being a grandmother has done very little to shorten the list. Yet I can hear one of my children say "Mom" on the phone and often know from that one word how the day has gone.

Isaiah says God calls His people by name. Think about that in a classroom in Lajas, where children came to learn and eat. A name on a list helped us keep track. Saying that name with real pleasure when a child arrived could tell them something no list ever could. *I'm glad it's you.*

If this year you have felt reduced to a patient number, a case, or the person who pays a particular bill, take a minute with that verse. Read your own name aloud. Sit with the tenderness of belonging to Someone who knows the sound of your voice.

Prayer

Redeemer, thank You for calling me by name. When I pass through the waters, hold me up. When I walk through the fire, keep me. Thank You that I am Yours, and nothing can change that. Amen.

Light for Today: Write your name on a card with the words "Thou art mine." Keep it where you will see it this week.

26

Thursday — Love That Came First



If today is December 24, turn to Christmas Eve.

Scripture

> *"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that*

we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." — 1 John 4:9–10

Reflection

Some team members come to the Dominican Republic ready to serve and, along the way, recognize how deeply they themselves need Christ. Some have chosen to be baptized right there in our river. Come to the riverbank in your imagination. A person you met at the beginning of the trip steps into the water. Christian baptism tells the story of belonging to Jesus in His death and resurrection. To see somebody rise from that water knowing they are loved is a joy I find hard to put into words.

John says God loved us first. That is what stays with me at the river. Long before a team member packed a bag or did a single act of service, Christ already loved the person who would stand in that water. He loves you as you sit reading this at home, too.

Prayer

Father, thank You for loving me first. When I feel empty, fill me again with Your love. Bless the children of Lajas de Yaroa and the learning center we are praying for. Let every child there know they are loved. Amen.

Light for Today: Reach out first to someone you have been waiting to hear from.

27

Friday — Treasured in Her Heart



If today is December 24, turn to Christmas Eve.

Scripture

> *"But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." — Luke 2:19*

Reflection

Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart. I love that Luke gives a mother a little privacy in the middle of a story the whole world will tell. She got to decide what to carry quietly.

If I could save a few minutes from our Christmases in Lajas, I might surprise myself with my choices. I'd keep the sound of somebody laughing so hard during a game that they can't explain what's funny. I'd keep a familiar voice singing karaoke in the next room while I finish in the kitchen. And I would keep the moment we pray, when the voices I can pick out in any crowd say amen together. I want my grandchildren to know how it felt to be prayed into a new year by people who knew exactly what the old one cost.

Which sound would you keep from a Christmas you loved? Write it down for somebody younger. Someday they may want to hear it through you.

Prayer

Lord, like Mary, I want to treasure what You have done. Thank You for carrying me through this year. Help me see Your hand in every season, and prepare my heart to welcome You again. Amen.

Reflection Questions

- What hard thing did God carry me through this year?
- What do I want to treasure from this Advent?
- How do I want to love others in the year ahead?

V

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

The waiting is over. The Light has come.

28

Christmas Eve: No Room, Yet Room for All



Lighting the Candles

Reader: *Tonight we light all four candles: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. (Light all four.) Tomorrow we will light the Christ Candle. Tonight,*

we remember that Jesus came quietly, into a hard and humble place.

All: *Come, Lord Jesus. There is room for You in our hearts and in our home.*

Scripture

> *"And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." — Luke 2:7*
>
> *"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." — Matthew 1:23*

Reflection

After raising eight children, I cannot read about Mary laying Jesus in a manger without thinking about how carefully you lower a sleeping newborn. Your hand stays beneath that little head until the very last second. A manger was a place for an animal's feed. A mother made it the first bed of the Son of God because that was the space available to her.

I think of families who found a home on Hope Mountain after displacement. A parent who can finally lay a child down somewhere safe has received something holy, even if the bed looks ordinary to everyone else.

Tonight you may be making room on a couch, unfolding a crib, or leaving a porch light on for someone coming late. I hope you feel close to Bethlehem as you do it.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You came to a world that had no room for You. Tonight I make room. Come into the messy, broken places of my life. Be Emmanuel, God with me. And be with every family we serve tonight, in the Dominican Republic, in Haiti, in Jamaica, in Eswatini, and here at home. Amen.

Family Moment

Read Luke 2:1–20 together by candlelight. Let the youngest person in the room place a baby Jesus in your nativity set, or simply hold a candle while the story is read.

29

Christmas Day: The Christ Candle



Lighting the Christ Candle

Reader: *Merry Christmas! We relight the Candles of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. (Relight all four.) Now we light the white candle in the center, the Christ Candle. Jesus, the Light of the World, is born!*

All: *Glory to God in the highest! Jesus, You are our Light. We will follow You.*

Light the white Christ Candle.

Scripture

> *"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." — John 1:4–5*
>
> *"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." — John 8:12*

Reflection

If I could choose where you'd read this last page, it would be at our table on Hope Mountain. I'd put the bread within reach and let you choose a teacup. Ruben and I would want to hear about your people after telling you so much about ours. I'd want to know which name you whispered when we prayed and which memory made you laugh out loud.

John calls Jesus the Light of the world. This Advent I've thought about what His light let me see. A woman on a street in Sosúa whose life is dear to Him. A family at the top of a steep trail. Neighbors making a place for one another in Luperón. Someone coming up out of the river with water running down their face. I have come to love Jesus more because I got to know people He loves.

If you ever feel that tug to come, I would love to welcome you on a mission team. And wherever you spend this Christmas, this grandmother's prayer goes with you. May Jesus be very near

in the room where you miss somebody. May there be laughter from the kitchen. May someone who knows your heart stay for one more cup. Feliz Navidad, from our family to yours.

Prayer

Jesus, Light of the World, happy birthday! Thank You for coming. Thank You for shining in my darkness and refusing to let it win. I will follow You. Make my life a light for others, so that hope, peace, joy, and love can reach every dark place You send me. Amen.

Family Moment

Before opening gifts, gather around the lit wreath. Have each person name one way Jesus was a light for them this year. Then sing "Joy to the World" or "Silent Night" together.

A Christmas Blessing for You

> *"The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."*
> *— Numbers 6:24–26*

If we were finishing our tea together, this is where I would ask if I could pray for you. Lord, bless the person holding this book. You know the people they worry about when the house gets quiet. Give them someone to share their joy and someone to help carry their grief.

Thank you for walking these roads with my family. I hope you'll think of us when you pass the bread this Christmas. I'll be thinking of you.

Keep the Light Shining

- Come serve alongside our Dominican leaders on a mission trip. To ask about joining a team, write to info@hopelifeglobal.com.
- Share this devotional with a friend who is walking through a hard season.
- Become a monthly partner. A gift of $10 to $35 a month supports our work with local leaders. We dream of more

children sharing a meal and learning together. Give at hopelifeglobal.com/giving.

Merry Christmas, and may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace.

With love,
Vicki Dominguez
HOPE Life Global
hopelifeglobal.com



About the Author

Vicki Dominguez is a wife, a mother, a grandmother, and the co-founder of HOPE Life Global. Above all, she is a woman who has found that God's light shines brightest in the hardest seasons, and she loves helping others find it too.

She and her husband, Ruben, raised eight children, and she had the joy of homeschooling all eight. For fifteen years they made their home on the mission field in the Dominican Republic. They gathered with neighbors under a mango tree in Juan López, taught children in Santiago, carried food up mountain trails, and prayed with women on the streets of Sosúa. Through HOPE Life Global, they still walk alongside Dominican leaders, caring for children, families, and women who need to know they are loved.

Vicki is also the author of *A Journey of Hope*, a 15-day devotional. Today she and Ruben are blessed with nine grandchildren, and her favorite sound is the noise of the whole family

together in one place.

She would love to hear from you. You can find her at hopelife-global.com.

You can connect with me on:

https://hopelifeglobal.com