good shepherd community church

devotional

RELIEF 2022

It's Christmastime and here at Good Shepherd, and we are thankful that you decided to pick up this devotional! Over the next five weeks, we will be digging deep into Luke 4:18-19 and discovering what Jesus meant by bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives, recovering sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor. We encourage you to read this devotional with your family or with your friends so that you may have meaningful and Christ-exalting conversations over this season. We pray that you will enjoy and savor the love of God that is displayed in Christ with those that you love as you gather each week.

Merry Christmas!

Joy to the World

By: Tiffany Ricketts

Joy to the world, the Lord is come. We sing it every year. At Christmastime, we decorate our houses with the word Joy. It hangs on our walls and adorns ornaments on our trees. We stuff it into cards and send it to our friends and family. We sing about it in well-known carols: Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Words so familiar we rarely stop to contemplate their meaning, absorb their truth, and let them penetrate our hearts. We rush on by with the season looking for the shiniest packages and biggest bows. Yet there is a stirring within us of something more, a hope worth celebrating, a joy that lasts.

But we know, come January 1st, life always seems to return to normal. Decorations come off our walls, ornaments go back into boxes, cards get recycled, and the music that filled our hearts and homes grows silent. The joy that was everywhere now seems lost in the mundane and the trials of reality. Joy to the world? Is it only temporary? Only for a season? How do we hold onto this glimmer of hope that shines in the Christmas season when the world grows dark? What does 'joy to the world' really mean?

Walk with me to a time long ago. Let's follow in the footsteps of a man who marked the pathway through a dark world, whose heart felt the weight we all feel, yet knew the truth that would bring joy worth singing about still today.

Tired and weary after enduring nearly six weeks of physical and spiritual hardship, Jesus made His way home to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, to the familiarity of friends and family. He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, just like He had done every Sabbath since He was a boy. Familiar songs, familiar words...a salve to His tired soul. When it was time for the customary reading from the Prophets, Jesus stood. He would read today's reading. Someone handed Him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

As He unrolled the scroll, I wonder if He looked out and looked around. Faces He knew well from childhood. He knew their stories, their daily life, knew their heartaches, their struggles. Some had little in their pockets to provide for their families, others had little in their hearts to sustain any hope for a meaningful life. Some toiled hard for a living, indebted to cruel masters; others were held captive by their own desires that led them into bondage. Some were blinded by sickness or disease; others were blind to the truth they were created to see. Some suffered under the oppression of Roman rule, others suffered from bruised hearts and shattered souls.

Just a short time before this, Jesus had been in the desert, alone, enduring the trials every human faces: the longing for provision when all seems destitute, the desire for a plan that will overcome pain and suffering, the yearning to be truly known, truly seen. Jesus was no foreigner to human hardship. He looked now into the hearts of the people He loved and knew they needed a message of hope and true joy. So, He unrolled the scroll and read what would have been very familiar words to all who were in the synagogue:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
Luke 4:18-19 ESV

These words were familiar because they spoke of the Messiah, the Anointed One, the One who would come to set them free from their poverty and oppression. These words stirred hope for a new way, a new life of freedom and joy. It's no wonder that when He finished reading and sat down in preparation to teach, the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. Tell us of the day we all long for! Teach us of the One who will bring freedom! Breathe life into our weary hearts with the hope of salvation!

Jesus heard their cries and answered with the truth we still sing about: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The time is now. I am the Messiah. Your salvation is here.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Life may be overwhelming. Darkness may seem to be winning. Hardship may feel never ending. But there is hope! There is joy! Jesus has come and His victory is complete. This is the joyous good news that never grows quiet, no matter the season.

Jesus announced His true identity and purpose to the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed. Over these next few weeks of the Christmas season, we are going to explore what He truly meant by these words, and how we, as the hands and feet of Jesus, can continue His ministry of spreading joy to the world. As we sing these familiar words this season, let us not miss their meaning. May the joy of this good news well up, spill over, and spread to those around us. Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

week one

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
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and recovering of sight to the blind,
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to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
Luke 4:18-19

By: Greg Cahalan

According to many of the teachers who influenced Jewish thinking in the first century, the Spirit of God had been silent for centuries. In the past, the Spirit of God had been powerfully present in His world, involving Himself in the lives of human beings. He came upon people to infuse them with new life, new vigor, new vision, new strength, and new powers of body and mind in order that they might play significant, important, decisive roles in God’s plan. The Holy Spirit had given Israel its law, its prophets, and the whole of its Scriptures, but He no longer seemed to be at work among the people.

Suddenly, however, at the very beginning of the story of Jesus, the Spirit is dynamically active again. In the first two chapters of Luke alone, the Spirit is mentioned fifteen times. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth (Luke 1:15); Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed God’s new work in the world (Luke 1:41); Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied of God’s goodness (Luke 1:67); John the Baptist grew and became strong by the Spirit (Luke 1:80); and the Spirit came upon Simeon and gave him special insight and guidance (Luke 2:25-26).

For those with eyes to see it, this revealed that the Messiah was coming! Long ago, God had promised an age when everyone who calls on the name of the LORD would be saved, and He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28-32). Through the prophet Isaiah, He promised to accomplish this through His "Anointed One."

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted..."
Isaiah 61:1

From the very first mention of Jesus, it is clear that He is this Anointed One. The Spirit was active in extraordinary ways at His birth (Luke 1:35), His baptism (Luke 3:22), His temptation (Luke 4:1), His teaching, His miracles, and every other aspect of His life and ministry (Luke 4:18-19), and it was prophesied that He would also baptize others with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16).

This is Good News for all of us because it is the Holy Spirit's role to give us the gifts of God's love. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). When it comes to being "good enough" or deserving God's love, we are all spiritually bankrupt because of our sin, but the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus and anointed Him to proclaim Good News to the poor. That's us! Joy to the world, He came to save us from our sins!

When we put our faith in Jesus, we receive the very same Spirit who anointed Him, and we join Him in proclaiming the Good News! "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20)!

Discussion Questions

- How would you explain the Good News about Jesus? Why is it such Good News?

- How have you experienced this Good News in your own life? If you have not experienced it, why do you think that is?

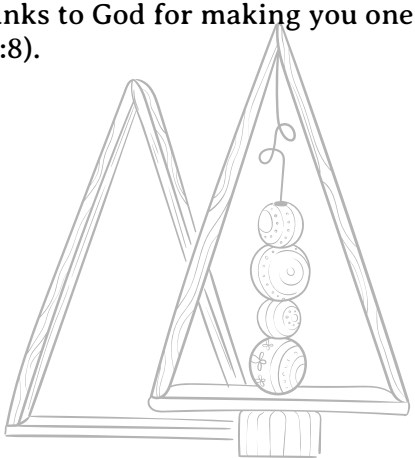
- Jesus has promised to give the Holy Spirit to all who receive Him. Read Acts 1:8. What do you think it means to receive power from the Holy Spirit to be a witness for Jesus?

- Who is one person that you can share the Good News of Jesus with this Christmas? When and how do you plan to do this? Spend some time praying for them and for the Holy Spirit to give you the power and courage to do it.

Family Activity

The Christmas season is a wonderful time to share the joy of knowing Jesus with those around us. As a family, practice telling each other the story of Jesus' birth. Then think of creative ways to share the story with others. Some ideas are to write letters, make hand drawn cards, make a video together, make cookies for others, visit nursing homes, go caroling... creativity is endless. Take time this Christmas season to be a family witness about who Jesus is and what Jesus has done to set us free from sin's curse. Plan what you will do now.

After you have been able to share the joy of knowing Jesus with those around you, talk about what it was like to be a witness. Give thanks to God for making you one of his witnesses (Acts 1:8).



Relief Projects

UNTO SEED PACKING

Global Outreach Staff Tiana Weaver works with Unto, the humanitarian arm of Cru. Unto's mission is to relieve suffering, restore dignity, and reveal hope. We would like to partner with Unto to provide funds for and to pack seed packets that will be given to those who live in vulnerable communities. These seeds help to provide a sustainable way for recipients to feed their families and communities.

Our Global Outreach Department is partnering with Unto to help in packing seeds on December 17 at Good Shepherd at 9:30am.

Scan the QR code or go to unto.gshep.us to register to help with the Seed Packing Event.

DOROBO OUTREACH PROJECT

Overseen by Global Outreach Staff Shel Arensen, the Dorobo Outreach Project works with the Dorobo tribe in Kenya. This year, we would like to help farmers stabilize their rain catchment in order to irrigate their crops. In addition, we are helping to add a few dairy animals that they will be able to feed with those crops and provide milk for their families.

week two

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
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to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
Luke 4:18-19

By: Kristi Knott

In Luke 4, Jesus proclaimed that the Messiah would give liberty to captives, but liberty looked different than most expected.

Early in His ministry, in John 4, Jesus was weary, thirsty, and tired from His three-day journey from Judea to the small town of Samaria. As He approached the town, He found a well, and sat by it. Soon a Samaritan woman came to Him, and Jesus asked, "Will you give me a drink?"

The woman was surprised by this request. Jews did not associate with Samaritans. Even more shocking was Jesus' next statement: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

Tired of coming to the well every day during intense heat, the woman eagerly asked Him for this living water. Her expectation at this moment was that Jesus would then share with her this "living water." Something tangible, something to drink. Instead, Jesus made a request. "Go, call your husband and come back."

At this, pangs pierced the woman's heart; she knew that she did not have a husband. In fact, she had been married five times and was now in a sinful relationship with a man who was not her husband. She was stuck in shame, embarrassment, and sin.

She tried her best to distract from this issue, and to talk about something else, but Jesus knew her. He could see past the walls that she put up deep into her soul. He could see that she was held captive to sin and the desire to find love. She did not know that Love was right in front of her.

In patient tenderness, Jesus declared that He was the Messiah, the One that she was waiting for, the Living Water that her soul so desperately needed.

In joy, the woman ran to her village to tell everyone about Jesus, to tell them that she had been freed by Him. No longer would she live in the bondage of sin. Jesus saw her, knew her, uncovered the shame she had been living in, and invited her to trust in Him.

Jesus has come to set free those who are held captive to sin and addictions. No longer do people have to live in the dark night of shame, held captive to gluttony, pornography, sensuality, drugs, or alcohol. He has come to bring liberty!

"No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found."
Joy to the World!

Discussion Questions

- What comes to mind when you think of the word captivity?

- In John 8:34, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin." How was the Samaritan woman a slave to sin?

- Being set free from captivity involves being set free from sin. Jesus declared, "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). What is the truth Jesus is referring to, and how do we come to know the truth? See John 14:6.

- Jesus has come to set free those who are enslaved to sin, so that they might live for God (See Romans 6:22).
    - How has Jesus set you free from sin?
    - In what ways can you live for God?

- Jesus has given His church the task of helping others who are enslaved to sin (See Daniel 12:3 and James 5:19-20). How can you be involved in helping those who are held captive by sin?

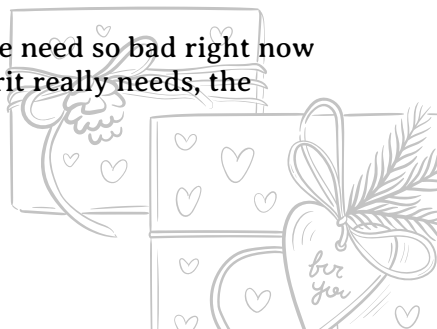
Family Activity

Every person is made to know, love, and live life with God. Our spirit, the part of us made to know God, craves a close friendship with God. It is kind of like how you feel when you are super thirsty. You know that feeling after being outside on a really hot day?

To help us remember the feeling of really wanting a drink of water, let's try a challenge together. We will try the saltine cracker challenge. This challenge has us trying to eat five saltine crackers in one minute, without taking a drink of water.

How did you do? How much do you want a drink of water right now? This thirst you have helps you understand how much you are made to love God. Just as your body craves water, your spirit craves God. When you come to know Jesus as your Savior you experience a deep drink of life that changes you forever. Your spirit knows it was made for this.

Ok, let's all have that drink of water we need so bad right now and thank Jesus for being who our spirit really needs, the Living Water (John 4:14).



Relief Projects

MY FATHER'S HOUSE

My Father's House is a local, gospel-based family shelter that focuses on getting people back on their feet through housing, financial literacy, teaching life skills, and providing job training to get families back into a stable and sustainable future. We would like to help them complete their new facility that will house a thrift store and coffee shop and will provide on-site job training and skills.

week three

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
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Luke 4:18-19

By: Keith Smith

In John 9, as Jesus was walking through town with His disciples, He came across a man who was born blind. His disciples, in their usual lack of understanding, asked, "Who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind?" Jesus revealed that neither was the case, "but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Having compassion on the man, Jesus healed his blindness.

What would it be like to be born in total darkness? To have never seen a familiar face, a glorious sunset, or the beauty of a mountain landscape? Maybe you have experienced this or know someone who has. Sight, for most people, is a primary way we understand the world. We need physical sight to see physically, likewise we also need spiritual sight to see spiritually. The problem is, we are all born into spiritual darkness because of sin and rebellion against God, and we need spiritual sight to be able to see Him and have faith in Him.

The man in our story had two kinds of blindness, physical and spiritual. The healing of his physical blindness was meant to reveal God's glory and goodness to both the man and those around him and open their eyes spiritually. In the end, the man saw that Jesus was the Messiah and put his faith in Him and worshiped Him (John 9:38). He once was blind, but now he sees.

2 Corinthians 4:4-6 says, "...the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The Good News of Christmas is that the Light has come into the world! John 1 tells us that Jesus, the true Light, has come to bring light to all people, and the darkness cannot overcome that light. Jesus came to open our spiritual eyes so that we can see and believe in Him!

When we put our faith in Jesus, we are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to His kingdom of light (Colossians 1:12-14). We are then empowered to live in the light, exposing darkness in the world (Ephesians 5:8-20). We get to take Jesus' light to bring His joy to the world, giving people true sight to behold His glory!

Discussion Questions

- What are some ways that you see spiritual blindness in those around you?
- From the following verses, what do you observe about Jesus being the light of the world? See John 1:1-14, 3:16-20, 8:12, Isaiah 9:1-7, and 42:1-9.
- Have you been able to see the Light of Jesus in your life and what difference has it made for you?
- How can you help those around you to see the Light of Jesus?

Family Activity

Take a walk one evening this week to look at Christmas lights in your area. Look for the brightest and most beautiful displays and talk about:

What would it be like to take this walk at night in another part of the year?

What would you look at while you walked at night without the lights?

Why are the lights so beautiful at night?

When you get home, read John 1:1-5 together. Talk together about what it means that Jesus is the "light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:5 ESV.

Pray a prayer of thanksgiving from John 1:9-12.

Relief Projects

TIMOTHY PROJECT

The Timothy Project serves over 150 children and young adults in the Karamoja region in northeastern Uganda, supporting their educational needs. We would like to partner with them to providing tuition and school supplies, as well as counseling and mentoring. Many of the children by the Timothy Project are orphans due to wars and HIV/AIDS, former street children, and pastors children.

UGANDA FARMING & FAMINE RELIEF

Global Outreach Staff Val & Waffle Lomilo work in an area in Uganda where famine and starvation are rampant. Due to global, regional and local factors, this area has been hit severely this year. We would like to provide emergency assistance, as well as funds for seed and a tractor that will vastly improve the output for farmers and their communities and stop the cycle of poverty by providing jobs and a food source, as well as some additional income.

week four

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
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Luke 4:18-19

By: Larry VanTuyl

This was amazing and joyful news! Jesus was announcing that the Messiah had arrived and was standing right in front of them. The Jews did not appreciate the significance of what Jesus was saying. But, as He read these words from the book of Isaiah, they certainly understood oppression! They were oppressed by the crushing pressure of sin and the law. In addition to the Law of Moses, the Rabbis had added hundreds of regulations which became required rabbinical tradition. This was Jewish life in the first century. Jesus severely criticized the religious leaders for demanding obedience to these traditions and for their own hypocrisy (Matthew 23:4).

Jesus' proclamation that He had come "to set at liberty those who are oppressed" was truly good news for Israel and for the world. He came to fulfill the Law and pay the penalty for our sins. Because of our sinfulness, God knew that it would be impossible for us to keep all the Law. In fact, God makes clear that the law was given to reveal sin, not to make us right with Him (Romans 3:20). We must not trust in ourselves to be made right with God. Only those who trust in Christ's sacrifice are freed from the oppression of the Law, forgiven for their sins, and made right with God. We no longer have to ask what work we must do to please God. As Jesus said in John 6:29, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

Jesus freed us from spiritual oppression, so that we could live in the freedom of the law of love. "Jesus replied, you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, an all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments," (Matthew 22:37-40).

As a child of God, our goal is to love Him with all our heart and to love our neighbor. Part of loving our neighbor is providing for the needy in our community. By serving our neighbors we are fulfilling an essential part of the law of love. There could be no greater message than that of God's provision of love and forgiveness. As we reflect God's love to others, it brings joy to them as well as to us. So, we can confidently proclaim and sing "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!"

Discussion Questions

- How can a person experience freedom from spiritual oppression? See 1 John 1:8-9.
- Describe how you have experienced this kind of freedom.
- How does being free from spiritual oppression empower you to love your neighbor?
- How will you show the love of God to your neighbor this Christmas season?

Family Activity

Have a family conversation about the different projects Good Shepherd is supporting with our Joy to the World relief offering. Share with one another which projects are the most interesting. Help each other see how each of these projects will help free the oppressed. Spend time praying for each of the projects and talking with God about how much your family can give. Finish your time by talking with your children about how you will decide on how much to give as a family this year. Give your children the opportunity to also give an offering to God to help free the oppressed in our world.

Relief Projects

EDUCATION MATTERS

Overseen by Global Outreach Staff Paul Meier, Education Matters gives Thai children and families hope for a much better future. Many families in Thailand have to choose between paying for basic necessities like food or paying for school. We would like to partner with Education Matters by covering a portion of these school fees, giving families an incentive and a means to keep their children in school. Children will be able to attend school and ultimately find employment that can support their family and dream of a better future.

SEED OF HOPE EDUCATION CENTER

Overseen by Global Outreach Staff Paul Meier, Seed of Hope provides housing for students from remote Thai villages while they attend Thai public school. Seed of Hope provides a safe place for students to live while they learn and ultimately help break the cycle of poverty. We would like to help them complete their Education Center, which will house a library, art room, classrooms, health room, and guest quarters for visiting teachers and volunteers.

week five

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
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Luke 4:18-19

By: Kristi Knott

Dancing and joy filled the streets that Sunday. Shouts could be heard throughout Jerusalem, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Jesus, then rode up and through Jerusalem riding on a donkey's colt. People, in their joy, began laying palm branches and their coats down along the path. The time had finally come! Jesus was finally coming to Jerusalem as the King—but not the way they thought.

It would only be five days later that the leaders of the Jews would conspire to have Jesus falsely accused, beaten, and condemned to death on a cross. Hopes were dashed to pieces. Many people wondered, wasn't He the one to rescue us?

They could not have known that it would take an act of God Himself becoming a baby, growing up to become a man, and laying down His life to set people free. They could not have known what freedom would cost or the immensity of the gift that was to be given. They could not have known the depth of their poverty, captivity, blindness, and oppression. It wasn't until three days later that hope would shine in their darkness. An empty tomb and a risen Savior would set the entire world on a new trajectory.

It is because of this that we live in the time of the "Lord's favor!" We get to proclaim to the world that God's favor has come through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Imagine this. God, the sovereign King of all creation and all things good and true, joyfully receives the guilty and brings pardon to those who deserve the wrath of God—that is us! He receives us into His kingdom, we who are spiritually poor, we who are slaves to sin, we who are blind to our sin, and we who are oppressed. He receives the prodigal son and daughter and welcomes them with open arms. Now is the time of God's favor towards humanity. Now is the time to hear His voice and to respond with joy and gladness!

As you gather with your family and friends this Christmas, remember Jesus. He is the greatest Gift of all. May we receive and proclaim our Savior and King this season. Indeed, it is the year of His favor!

Joy to the world, the Lord is come, let Earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room! And Heaven and nature sing!

Discussion Questions

- What do you think it means that God favors you?
- Ephesians 1:3-7 describe spiritual blessings for those who are in Christ. How do these blessings reveal God's favor toward us?
- Take a moment to thank God for His favor in your life.
- God's favor is also displayed in His patience with the world. How is God being patient with the world and why is His patience so crucial? See 2 Peter 3:9-10.
- Jesus said that now is the time to proclaim the Good News. Who can you pray for or speak to about Jesus?

Family Activity

New Year's resolutions are a wonderful time for you and your family to set the tone for the upcoming year. This year, consider celebrating the favor of the Lord by proclaiming God's Good News with others. Together, choose a specific number of families you will pray for and tell the Good News of God to. Find a way to keep that number in mind this year. You could have a countdown on your refrigerator, a weekly Alexa/Google/Siri reminder, post-it notes on mirrors, or a way your family interacts with each other.

Wrap up your time by praying a thanksgiving prayer from Luke 4:16-21. Jesus is the Savior of the world!

Relief Projects

JOSIAH VENTURE UKRAINE RELIEF FUND

Josiah Venture has been active in the Balkan region for over 25 years and are uniquely suited to work alongside churches in Ukraine as they minister to their communities. We would like to continue partnering with them to get much needed supplies into the country and these churches, who will then distribute them to the areas directly impacted by the war.

MIDDLE EAST MEDICAL

Together with partners in the area, we would like to sponsor a weekly medical clinic at an Evangelical church that serves primarily refugees. When people come to the clinic, family doctors will treat patients free of charge. Treating the physical needs of the community opens doors to addressing spiritual needs with the gospel.

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
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