

Walking with Jesus through Lent

A Zoe Empowers Devotional

Journey with Jesus from Ash Wednesday and his temptation in the wilderness, through his healing/teaching ministry of compassion, and ending with words of wisdom from the cross on Good Friday.



Ash Wednesday

Read Luke 4:1-15

This story takes place right after the beautiful scene of Jesus' baptism, with the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. But do you notice in Luke's account that it is the Spirit that leads Jesus out into the wilderness? There he fasted for 40 days, and was tempted by the devil.

Why would the Spirit of God direct Jesus to such a place, right after he hears God's voice saying "You are my son, the Beloved- with you I am well pleased!"?

It seems we sometimes overlook the benefits of "wilderness time" in the discipline of learning to distinguish God's voice from the voice of temptation. In our busy, noisy lives, the voices can blur, making temptation harder to notice.

But Jesus clearly identifies the source of the voice and stands firm, backed by God's word. He rejects self-indulgence, power, popularity, greed, and idolatry in favor of his God-given calling. Jesus' experience of 40 days of hunger aligns him in solidarity with the poor who often go without food involuntarily.

Almost every child entering the Zoe Empowers program describes the experience of "sleeping hungry" or going days with no food, having to beg or steal to survive.

Most of us have no real possibility of going hungry, although many in our country still do. Many of us do not participate in voluntary hunger through fasting (unless it is for weight loss!) on a regular basis, if at all, for spiritual purposes.

But today we take note of Jesus' example of fasting for deeper spiritual awareness and closeness to God. This example has been followed by Christians for centuries during the 40 days of Lent. Today, if we are honest, we must confess that we have succumbed to the temptations of self-indulgence, pride, seeking popularity, power or control, or some type of idolatry where we elevate our own will and desires over God's. We are truly sorry, Lord.

During Lent we are invited to think deeply about this, and fast from something we "can't live without." This practice is not meant as a personal challenge of willpower or a punitive deprivation of our self, but rather a spiritual tool to clear space in our minds, hearts, and time for more of God, and the values of God's reign in our lives.

Ash Wednesday

What is it that fills your time, demands your financial resources, or keeps you “too busy” for prayer? What goals are the focus of your life? Take some quiet time away to ponder these questions- a whole day, if you can, or at least a few hours. Try fasting from everything in your “normal” life for this time and you will soon discover what your body, mind, and spirit crave most, and what is a higher priority in your life than God.

Is it your cell phone, Facebook, coffee drink, cookies, candy, shopping, fast food, TV, sports, video games, work- to name a few? We are so used to being “full” all the time, but Lent calls us to experience some “emptying” to know who we really are and to become more like Jesus.

Try fasting from one of your “cravings” this Lent. Giving up something so you can take on something better. Give the time saved to prayer, daily reading through the gospel of Luke, and serving others in a food pantry or other act of service.

For example, you might give the money saved from skipping your Starbucks or fast food to Zoe Empowers to help empower an orphan child-headed family that would love to raise their own food to eat today and every day. This is fasting with a purpose.

Let's go to Kenya now to visit 16-year-old Glory, in her first year of Zoe Empowers, and see how the gifts from your fasting can transform the lives of hungry children.

Launch Video

Fasting is hard at first, but you will find deep peace, joy, and freedom as you loosen these bonds and perhaps embrace a new lifestyle of simple living.

Take some time this week to discuss what your family or small group might do together to give up something and in the process take on better health, more prayer time, deeper interpersonal relationships, and more generosity to orphaned and vulnerable children. Doing this with others helps you to be accountable.

Some ideas might include giving up a pizza night weekly or having rice and beans once a week and donating the money saved. Making your own coffee at home and giving that \$15-20 to Zoe youth instead of Starbucks.

Let's go to Rwanda to visit Anne Marie and see how even small gifts can be life-saving for vulnerable children.

Launch Video

Ash Wednesday

Fasting is not only about food! You can fast from bad attitudes or behaviors, like criticism, complaining, hate, or gossiping, and take on more kindness, encouragement, love, and gratitude.

Maybe you will decide to give up all cell phones into a basket at dinner and use the time to really listen and share your lives, building relationships, and sharing prayer together for one another.

How about giving up TV (totally or for one night a week) and using the time to take a walk, read books together, play games, or learn more about the lives of the Zoe children by watching the videos in this devotional resource together, or exploring the website www.zoeempowers.org. Lent can be an important time to improve your health and family relationships.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What stood out for you in the videos?
2. What are some things you would find hard to "live without"?
3. What is a temptation you struggle with?
4. Have you ever experienced wilderness or retreat time or fasting? Share how that was for you. What did you gain?
5. How can you create more space for listening to God's voice?

Prayer

Jesus, we see your example of spiritual seeking and faithfulness to God and we confess that is not always our path. Help us to walk closer to you in these 40 days of Lent! Open our eyes to the things that clutter our days so we may discern what to fast from in order to feast more on your love. Fill us with your spirit today and open our hearts more and more to the needs of others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Action

Take time to be alone and quiet asking God to guide you. Make a covenant with yourself, family and/or small group to fast in a particular, meaningful way this Lent. Write down your pledge. Designate a box, bowl or basket as your Zoe Blessing box in which to place money saved or IOU's for your sacrificial gifts to Zoe children.

Mark your Bible for Luke 1 to begin the scripture journey. Read a chapter each day. For example, if you fast from lunch, use the time to read and pray. Instead of watching TV, read a Bible story about Jesus with your kids and talk about it.

LENT 1

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Read Luke 2:41-52

This unique story, found only in Luke's gospel, gives us a window into the capabilities of Jesus as a 12-year-old youth. His mother still addresses him as "child", but he is already clear on his vocation and mission in life! Still, when found in the Temple, Jesus returns obediently with his parents.

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor" (verse 52).

Jesus still had more to learn and was blessed with a godly mother and father to help guide and instruct him in life skills, human experiences and relationships, vocational training, and spiritual wisdom.

Zoe Empowers participants often lack an adult role model or care giver to teach and nurture them, having lost one or both parents and sometimes all relatives. Zoe staff reach out to local leaders for help in seeking the most alone, desperate and impoverished children and youth. Sometimes these child-headed families are on their own, and some live with an elderly or disabled grandparent who cannot provide for them.

Let's go now to an urban area in Vizag, India and meet Shanmukh, his brother and grandmother, and hear about his dreams.

[Launch Video](#)

These young people, lacking parents to support and guide them, still have capabilities and dreams. They dream of vocations like carpentry, hairdressing, tailoring, or business ownership. They desire to raise animals and learn how to farm their family land, and are willing to work hard to achieve their dreams! They lack only funds to begin and the skills to succeed. Through trainings, group support, and local mentors, Zoe helps them "grow in wisdom and years". Through small financial inputs, Zoe sets them on a path that allows them to build upon their labors, save, and grow their businesses.

Zoe's approach is unique in that it entrusts the youth themselves to lead in their journey out of poverty as they follow their own dreams!

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Let's visit Christophe in Rwanda to see how he and his family have progressed in their dreams so far in the Zoe program.

[Launch Video](#)

Now let's travel to a different setting in remote rural Zimbabwe to see how Tadiwanashe and her siblings are pursuing their dreams of farming.

[Launch Video](#)

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What struck you in the stories of Christophe and Tadiwanashe?
2. How do you think these stories would impact your children/grandchildren or the youth in your church?
3. Think about the gifts and abilities of teens. How have you seen them being empowered in your family, church, or community?
4. How does a child-led approach build confidence and character in the Zoe young people? How do you see them support one another in their group?

Prayer

Jesus, you were once a vulnerable child in a poor family, and you grew into manhood in a small village. Open our eyes to the beautiful gifts of our youth. Help us to see and support the young people in our own communities and in the Zoe program in ways that respect and empower them. May we listen and support their dreams. In your name we pray, Amen.

Action

Be intentional this week to talk with a young person and listen to their dreams, whether your own child/grandchild, or one in your neighborhood or church. What support or encouragement do they need?

If your church youth are not involved in this study, encourage their leaders to join in, or plan a Zoe night at youth group to share some videos and talk about their dreams. Encourage youth to plan a unique Zoe fundraiser!

Zoe Empowers is offering a new VBS mission curriculum for Summer 2022 called "International Dream Hunters" so plan to make use of it in your VBS!

LENT 2

“I Do Choose”

Read Luke 5:12-16

Healing was central to Jesus' ministry, and a sign of God's reign of love and compassion breaking in. This story is striking in that this man's illness has resulted not only in physical suffering and deformity, but also in devastating social stigma and isolation. Even so, he bravely asks Jesus for help, hoping He might be different and choose to come near instead of running away.

“Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” Jesus reaches out, touches the untouchable, and verbally assures him, saying, “I DO choose! Be made clean.”

Of course, from our perspective, it seems a no-brainer that we would choose to heal someone if we could. However, the way he asks makes it clear that many people previously walked away, leaving him with little hope.

We today have so many choices, don't we? We have the choice to save our resources for ourselves or share them. To keep our love and compassion only for those who look or think like we do, or give it freely. To see those who are suffering or look away. But Jesus chooses to see him, reach out to him, and share his gift of healing and wholeness.

Through Zoe Empowers, we are offered a chance and a choice—to see vulnerable children and their families, and to choose to offer them holistic health, healing love and a future with hope. For impoverished children, food is medicine!

Let's travel to Tanzania now and visit Salha, and see how the stigma and fear of a skin condition caused great hardship for this family until they joined Zoe.

[Launch Video](#)

Jesus doesn't stop at physical healing for this man. He realizes his need for social healing. Thus, he sends him to the priest to be seen and restored to his place in the community. Here he can also give a witness to God's grace in his life!

Orphaned children often experience stigma and isolation, sometimes because of fear of AIDS, sometimes because of their begging for food, or just for the fact they are living in extreme poverty. Through Zoe Empowers, we get to see once stigmatized and isolated children restored to dignity and connection in their communities.

Come and see how as Marianne in Rwanda shares her life story of moving her family out of the stigma of extreme poverty.

[Launch Video](#)

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. How is your Lenten fast going? What choices are you making?
2. How can you as a family, small group or church choose to bring healing and hope to vulnerable children?
3. Who in your local community are stigmatized or marginalized?
4. How can you choose to offer them a hand of healing and welcome?

Prayer

Jesus, we give thanks for your example of never hesitating to choose reaching out and touching people with your love and compassion. Help us to be more aware of those needing us to choose- kindness, gentleness, a soft word in response to anger, healing touch, or even just a smile. May we be generous and unhesitating in our compassionate love. For we are your body, praying in your name, Amen.

Action

Discuss ways you, your extended family, small group or church can choose to touch more orphaned young people in the future. Let this scripture speak to you about your financial choices. Add to your Blessing box today.

"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." - 1 John 3:16-18

LENT 3

Jairus' Daughter

Read Luke 8:40-56

This amazing story can be intersected in so different many ways! It is a story of a father's love and dedication for his little girl, the suffering hopelessness of an unnamed woman, the demands and expectations of the crowd, and the issue of dealing with interruptions and conflicting needs. How does Jesus, without annoyance or anger, cope with being pressed upon on all sides, and still offer compassion, healing and individual respect and connection? So much juggling! Have you ever felt that way?

But let's focus in, as Jesus did, upon the individuals amid the crowd who so desperately needed help. Interestingly, both the girl and the woman have no name and no voice in the story. This highlights the voiceless, powerless "least" of Jesus' day- women and children. But Jairus' daughter is privileged to have a father who is a prominent synagogue leader, willing to speak for her, and even humbly beg for help in public. He falls at Jesus' feet- no doubt a position unfamiliar for him. He does it for love.

The penniless hemorrhaging woman has only her desperation, faith, and courage, propelling her to chance a touch of Jesus' garment. Jesus could have rushed on to his "important" task but instead stops to "see" her, and pronounce a blessing upon her in front of all.

"Daughter, your faith has made you well." She, too, is a daughter of someone very important! Her witness of trust in God is important enough to stop Jesus in His tracks. What good news for the crowd, and what challenging news for Jairus and all the "important" leaders in the village. They, too, need to see and care for all God's daughters and sons.

The story closes with the poignant scene of Jesus ignoring the jeering crowd and healing Jairus' daughter. Taking her hand tenderly he lifts her up to new life, instructing her parents to "give her something to eat". Jesus has enough love and healing for all.

What about us? With over 385 million children living in extreme poverty in our world, the majority in India and sub-Saharan Africa, it is easy to get overwhelmed and give up in despair.

Jairus' Daughter

But focusing in on what we can do is a way of following Jesus' example of compassionate care. When Mother Teresa was asked once how it was that she was able to help so many, she answered "If I had never picked up the first person, I would never have picked up the 42,000 in Calcutta."

Orphaned children, especially girls and young women, are still among the most voiceless, powerless, and abused in our world today.

Let's visit Joselyne and her sister in Rwanda and hear how these girls, alone and desperate, were touched by Zoe Empowers.

[Launch Video](#)

The story of Aness in Malawi also highlights the vulnerability of young women left fatherless. Let's hear her story now.

[Launch Video](#)

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What do you notice in these young girls' stories? How does their story intersect the biblical story?
2. How do you deal with overwhelming or conflicting needs and demands on your time? What can you learn from Jesus?
3. How do Jesus' words and actions impact the woman and the girl in our text? How do the words and actions of Zoe Empowers impact the lives of the girls in our videos?

Prayer

God of grace and unlimited love, we thank you for seeing us and calling each of us your beloved child! Help us to turn to you when we feel overwhelmed by the needs around us. Inspire us to find joy in helping the ones we can. Give us generous hearts for those who suffer in silence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Action

In gratitude for all the blessings you have received, especially times of healing, place an offering or IOU in your Zoe box, to help bring protection, hope and healing to more children in need.

LENT 4

Blessing the Children

Read Mark 10:13-16.

What picture came to mind for you as you read this week's scripture? Maybe neatly dressed children and babies, carried by their parents coming to get a pat on the head from the famous rabbi? We've all seen those on church walls and Sunday School papers. But let's dig a little deeper and see what Mark may be revealing.

In Jewish culture, the father would be the one to bring a child to the rabbi, as we saw with Jairus. But the text does not say "fathers" or "parents," only "people"—"they." And why were they bringing them in order for Jesus to touch them?

Haptomai is a Greek word for "healing touch" that comes up many times in Mark. Think about the woman who touched his robe, or when Jesus touched a leper or blind man. Those who wanted a touch need healing!

Now, let's consider who these children might be: Sick children? Poor street children brought by people of the community? Orphans with no father to present them?

The disciples had previously sent them away because everyone saw them as a nuisance—a problem—as "less than." But Jesus sees them as the very ones his kingdom belongs to! Seeing them deprived of love and care makes Jesus ANGRY!

Clearly, this story shows it is a priority value of God's kingdom and heart that we DON'T TURN AWAY but rather SEE the suffering children in our world!

Zoe participants often say they were seen as a nuisance in their communities and often stigmatized and isolated, even mistreated and cheated.

Let's go to Rwanda and meet Joseph. Perhaps he gives a new picture of what the children coming to Jesus may have looked like.

[Launch Video](#)

Jesus first SEES the children. Then he draws them into community, saying "Let the children come to me." He models for his disciples and us the healing power of welcome, love, and touch. His approach to these "problem" children is holistic and includes their need for loving relationships, health, and community. He recognizes their value in God's kingdom!

Blessing the Children

We also see God's kingdom in humbling ways through the Zoe participants. Once they are welcomed with God's love, they work hard, begin to share whatever they have and often train or hire other children and adopt other orphans.

Let's visit **Bosco in Rwanda** and see how his life has changed.

[Launch Video](#)

At the end of this Bible story is the beautiful image of Jesus reaching down and lifting up the children, laying healing hands on them and blessing them.

Modeled after Jesus' actions, Zoe Empowers reaches out to the least, searching villages and town for the most vulnerable children with no one to care for them, and lifts them up.

Zoe staff invite them to join community empowerment groups to learn skills, heal and restore their dignity and self-worth, and share their dreams. This child-centered approach blesses them with a hope-filled future.

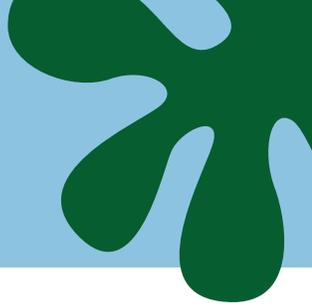
Let's visit **Vimbai in Zimbabwe** and see how tailoring skills and a Zoe mentor are changing their lives.

[Launch Video](#)

In Mark 10:16, Jesus finally "blesses" the children- the only time in Mark where it says Jesus "blesses" someone. In Hebrew scriptures we have seen many times how the Jewish father blesses the eldest son in the family, bestowing honor and a good future. Jesus' blessing these poor children is remarkable, and shows them they have a Father in Heaven who loves them.

Did you notice that the Zoe young people always pray for God's blessings for those who have helped them? They are truly thankful and want to pass on their blessings. Through Zoe, they, too, come to know they are blessed and loved by God!

Blessing the Children



Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What thoughts do you have about this scripture story?
2. What did you notice or wonder about in the videos? How do their stories connect with the biblical text?
3. Where are you or your church involved in seeing and blessing children?

Prayer

Lord, as we walk with you through Lent, we want to be more like you. Help us to open our hearts and eyes to see the vulnerable children in our community and world, and open our hands to lift them up with generosity and love. In your name, Amen.

Action

Add a gift or IOU to your Zoe Lenten Offering in thanksgiving for each child in your family, each grandchild and/or each child in your church family. Know that your gift will transform and bless a child! Speak a word of blessing to a child in your own life today!

LENT 5

Extravagant Love

Read Mark 14:3-9

In Mark's gospel, the story of the anointing at Bethany takes place just prior to the Last Supper and betrayal of Jesus. It contrasts the love of the woman with the betrayal of Judas. In John's account, the anointing woman is identified as Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, but in Mark, she remains unnamed.

Mary breaks open an expensive jar of ointment and pours it on Jesus' head (an action normally reserved for a prophet anointing a king). Jesus defends her extravagant act of love, anointing him in advance for his burial. This woman disciple understands his mission. She knows she cannot save him, but "she has done what she could." With the highest praise, Jesus announces that the story of her great love will be told to the whole world in memory of her.

Jesus also answers her detractors with these words: *"You will always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish, but you will not always have me."*

Sometimes people use these words as an excuse to resignedly overlook the ever-present poor and focus on the church or "spiritual" things. Rather, Jesus is pointing us to the place where we can always meet him and lovingly serve him, once he is gone. As he says in Matthew 25, "whatever you have done to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done to me."

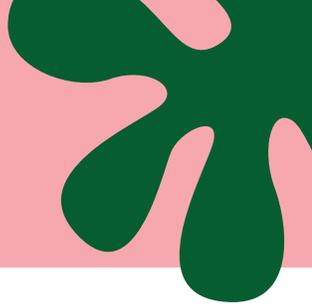
We have the privilege of following the example of the anointing woman, and of our Lord, in pouring out sacrificial, extravagant love. Sadly, the poor, the orphan, the homeless, the "least of these" are still with us. We CAN choose to help them in ways that do no harm, remembering Jesus' promise that he will be there, too.

We go now to visit Jacques in Rwanda, whose sacrificial love and care for his father and siblings is evident as he tells his story.

[Launch Video](#)

Mercy, a first year Zoe participant, shares her story and how the love of Zoe inspires them to share love with others. Let's go to Kenya and see them.

[Launch Video](#)



Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. Where did you see extravagant love in the video stories? What struck you in each one?
2. What connections do you make from this biblical text to the Zoe young people's experiences?
3. How does Zoe teach and demonstrate true "kindness" to the poor in Jesus' name?

Prayer

God of extravagant love, we thank you today for all the blessings you pour into our lives, and for the love your spirit pours into our hearts. Empower us to freely give our treasures like Mary did, not holding back, and to be generous with our love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Action

Take time to look around your home for things that might seem extravagant to a Zoe child. In gratitude for all you have, place an extravagant gift in your Zoe box today!

Ask God to show you who in your family, church or community needs a gift of your extravagant love today, perhaps through a phone call, letter, meal or listening ear. Take action!

LENT 6

Palm/Passion Sunday

As Lent draws to a close and we walk with Jesus into Jerusalem, we come to this Sunday that is a mixture of images and emotions. We tend to love the parade on Palm Sunday and join with the crowd singing "Hosanna!" But we often wish to avoid the end of Jesus' journey, when the crowds reject him and the shouts turn to "Crucify him!"

This week our studies will focus on two of the last sayings of Jesus from the cross. Parting words carry weight and deep meaning, and these in particular have a special connection for vulnerable children. Today we will explore Jesus' words to his mother and John, creating a new family.

Read John 19: 16-27

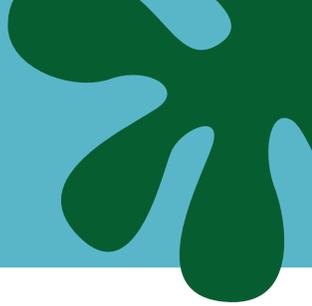
Even in his own terrible suffering, Jesus uses his strength to provide for his mother after his death. This mental agony of knowing the grief and future suffering of loved ones left helpless is weighing heavily on Him in his final hour.

Jesus has taught that God's family is wider than just blood relatives, and that "all who do the will of God are my mother, brothers and sisters." (Mark 3:33-35) He demonstrates this by uniting his dear disciple, John, with his mother, Mary, by this time assumed to be a widow, saying "Woman, here is your son...here is your mother." And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home. (John 19:27)

Motivated by the witness of Jesus, Zoe Empowers staff see the children's deep pain and loss. At their first meeting together, Zoe participants are told they are beloved children of God. Together they will experience life-changing trainings, work in mutual help activities at each other's homes and farms, do business together, and share their life stories. A new family is formed, as with Mary and John, based upon the foundation of God's love, and their mutual grief and needs.

The young people form deep bonds of friendship and kinship that help to heal their pain and isolation. These empowerment groups, at the core of the program's effectiveness, continue to serve as extended families even after they graduate from the program. Group members have acted as "parents" at a young person's wedding, or as a protective older brother, walking younger women participants to their home or fields in safety.

Palm/Passion Sunday



Many times, once they have experienced the welcome of their group, Zoe participants invite other vulnerable children in the community to join their group, or mentor them in skills to help improve their lives. The love of Jesus spreads into a wider family!

Let's meet Boniface in Kenya and see how the new Zoe "family" changed the lives of these grieving, isolated young people.

[Launch Video](#)

The critical role of the Zoe Empowerment group supporters is also very important in the lives of these children. They refer to their sponsors as "parents" because they have fulfilled that role which their parents would have done. They remember and speak often of their sponsor's love and prayers, and pray for them. You can see this in the sample letter below, written by the Ejoheza "Bright Future" Empowerment group in Rwanda for their sponsor church at the time of their graduation from Zoe.



Dear Parents,

The whole group Ejoheza, we thank you, our sponsor First Methodist Mansfield for the aid you gave us that changed our lives positively.

Honestly, dear parents the help you gave us has played a great role in our daily life; we were able to get knowledge and skills from different vocational trainings hence, we become empowered and we continue to progress. We started helping other people living in miserable life by giving them lessons on how to save money from the small projects.

Dear Parents, we promise you that we will never disappoint you abusing your kindness for us; the battle of poverty reduction will continue! We can't end talking about your boundless generosity, only may God give you more.

Beautiful parents, First Methodist Mansfield, we cannot find the best way to express our gratitude based on what you have done to us. May God continue to bless you and fill your tank.

Thank you enormously and blessings on you!!

Le 31/08/2021

Rwanda
Amageffe
Ruhango
Ntongwe
Nyarabungo

Impamvu - Gushimira

Methodist Mansfield Tuebwe abagize Itsinda Ejoheza
Tubashimiye Inkungu Mwaduteye n'ubugwaneza
Mwabikoranye byatumye tugira aho twa naho tugera.

First Methodist Mansfield Inkungu Mwaduhaye
yatunye tugira ibyo tugeraho banwe bize imyuga,
Abandi bakora imyuga itandukanye. none twize
Imbere ubu twakataje mu iterambere biturutse
ku bugwaneza bwanyu. Natwe twabigiyeho turi
gufasha abandi banze nkuko twari tumaze
Tubigisha kwizigwirira bahereye ku mishinga
myugufi bakiteza imbere bakagera kuri byinshi.

Mwaturinze bigatuma tugira aho twa naho
Tugera tubasezeranyiseho Tutazabatunguhwa
Murugendo rw'iterambere mwatweretse.

Mansfield twatwaga Ineza yanyu ngo ayira-
ngize Imana i komeze kubongerera ibasubiri-
tize aho mukura.

Murakomeze Imana ibabere imigisha.
Ryari Itsinda Ejoheza
Dusubi

Similarly, during the visit of supporters from Belmont UMC to Rwanda, they met their group and Esperanza offered a poem and a prayer to say thank you.

Launch Video

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What do you notice in these young people's stories? What roles does the group play in their lives?
2. How has your extended family helped you in life? Think back to your youth? How have you supported your children, grandchildren or other young people in their life journeys?
3. How do the supporters of Zoe groups help to fulfill the role of parents for these orphaned children? What are the blessings for each?

Prayer

Gracious Parent of all, Father of the fatherless, We thank you today for the witness of Jesus' sacrificial love and care for his mother and his disciple John. Thank you for all the ways our families and church families have helped and cared for us. Forgive us for often thinking our "family" is only made up of our own relatives, when your definition of family is so much bigger! Give us more love for all God's children, and the generosity to share so all may have the abundant life you came to give. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Action

Make a list of all the people you count as family. In gratitude, place an offering or IOU in your Zoe box for each one. Be thankful for how they have impacted your life.

Prayerfully explore becoming a Zoe group supporter, as an individual, small group or church. More children need your help on an ongoing basis, and you will be blessed by enlarging your "family"! See below how you can get more involved in changing young people's lives.

Make a pledge to partner with a full empowerment group or half empowerment group. Collective monthly giving partnerships are also available. It only takes 20 people giving \$35/month to empower 60-100 orphaned children.

Learn More: www.zmpw.rs/group-partner

Good Friday

Psalm 69:1-3, 19-21 and John 19:16-30

Today, on this most holy day of Jesus' sacrifice for us, we focus upon his final parting words from the cross in John's gospel. Jesus expresses his full humanity in his primal, anguished cry "I thirst." With this simple phrase, he joins himself to all the yearnings of humanity at the most basic level—the physical thirst for water, the critical substance that supports all life.

Clean, safe water is often such a struggle for children living in poverty, with hours each day spent walking several miles to fill a bucket or jug from a river or communal well. In times of drought, regularly experienced in countries like Zimbabwe, one can see water cans lined up at the well while the slow drip-drip fills the first can in line. Children are often sickened by impure water, having no knowledge of water-borne diseases, and often a lack of proper toilet facilities.

Zoe Empowers teaches the children to boil their drinking water, build latrines, use dish drying racks, install rainwater containers, and how to do proper handwashing to prevent diseases. This knowledge has a tremendous impact on family health.

Let's visit Dennis in Kenya and see how health teaching and the support of his group have impacted this family's life.

[Launch Video](#)

In India, Zoe helped Jayasri gain knowledge about hygiene that has helped her and her family who live in an urban slum.

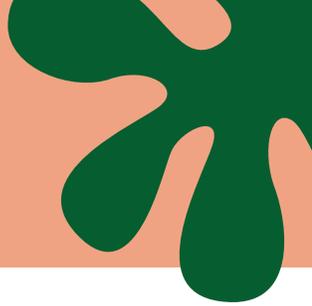
[Launch Video](#)

Water is also necessary for the success of many of the Zoe young peoples' projects, especially in the dry, rural areas of Zimbabwe. Let's visit some families there now and see how the gift of water has improved their lives.

Meet Jonah, whose biblical name already connects him to water!

[Launch Video](#)

Good Friday



This family of orphans in a very remote area had land but no water or farming knowledge or seeds to have a garden.

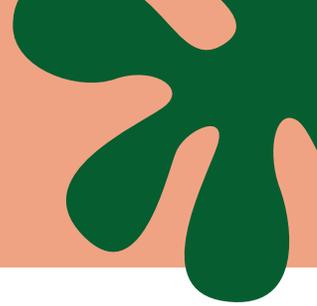
Come and see what Tariro and her family have achieved with Zoe's help!

[Launch Video](#)

Physical thirst, however, is not the only thirst that Jesus experiences on the cross. He also thirsts for spiritual connection with God, for emotional support from his now deserting followers, and especially for the acceptance of his mission of love to the world. It is a deep, piercing thirst in which all human and divine companionship has been stripped away and he is left alone and rejected in God-forsakenness.

Prior to joining Zoe, vulnerable youth have also experienced this kind of despair and spiritual, emotional, and relational thirst; rejected, isolated, stigmatized, and cut-off from their community. They thirst for the lost love of parents, and the support of friends and neighbors.

Jesus' final words "It is finished" are not resignation, but the affirmation that, despite the pain, suffering, and rejection, he has completed his self-giving mission of love to the world. Now, empowered by his spirit, it is our task to carry it on in his name.



Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What are you thirsting for most in your life right now?
2. What struck you in the stories of Dennis, Jayasri, Jonah, or Tariro?
3. How is the thirst for community connection fulfilled through the Zoe model? How can we incorporate this method in our own lives and communities?

Prayer

Creator God, you have given us the gift of life through water. Forgive us for our waste of this precious resource, and our failure to help others have what we take for granted. Thank you, Lord, for speaking out in solidarity with all those who thirst for water, love, family or hope. In your name we pray, Amen.

Action

Be conscious this week of conserving water! Whenever you turn on a tap, or take a shower, or get a drink of water, pray for those who labor for hours to get clean water. Add a gift to your Zoe box for each water tap you have in your house, inside and out! Be thankful!

EASTER IS COMING! Add up all your gifts and IOUs and prepare your gift to offer on Easter Sunday in worship or online, giving thanks for the gift of new life through Jesus Christ and the Resurrection! Your generous gift will help bring new life and hope to children who need it most! You may also give your Easter offering online at www.zoeempowers.org/donate. (Checks can be made to your church with memo: Zoe Empowers, or made out to Zoe Empowers and sent directly to the address below.)

Happy Easter! May God bless you!

**Zoe Empowers
PO Box 28839**