

REFUGE

WITHIN ORPHANHOOD

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Celebrating five years

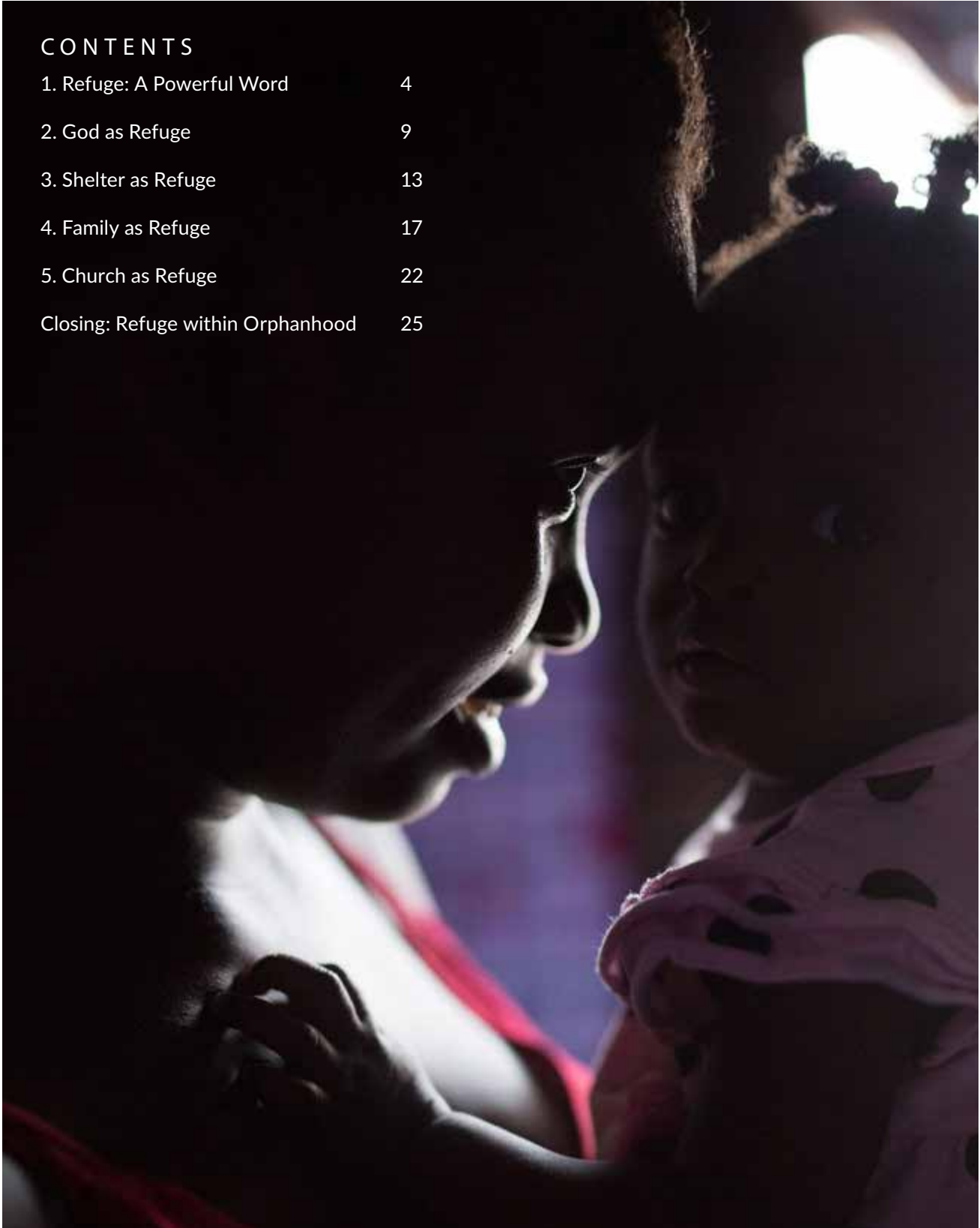


MWANA
VILLAGES

of the Mwana Refuge

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INTRODUCTION



I remember clearly what it was that made Mwana so different from the other orphan care organizations we had come to know through our long, eye-opening and heartbreaking adoption process. It was something so simple yet so powerful: **The people of Mwana showed dignity and acted with integrity.**

To the desperate mother who saw no option but to abandon her baby, Mwana treated them both with dignity. To that same mother, they acted with integrity by upholding her God-given responsibility as a mother to her child. They did not suggest adoption. They did not scorn her for life choices that, in part, led to her present circumstances. They sat with her. They listened. They came alongside. They met practical needs. They offered eternal hope. In short, **Mwana provided refuge.**

This devotional unpacks the biblical concept of refuge and what it means for us to find refuge in God and then be moved by this faith to join in the hard, yet important work of providing refuge. We pray you will be moved.

Wellon Bridgers , U.S. Director and Mwana adoptive mother

TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OUT OF THE DEVOTIONAL:

When reading Scripture, it can be helpful to follow this model:

- 1) Read surrounding verses to establish context.
- 2) Make sure you build basic comprehension of the passage.
How would you summarize it?
- 3) Ask yourself: what does this passage say about me?
How can I see this passage in light of my life or circumstances?
- 4) Ask the Lord to show you: what does this passage show you about God's character?
How does the passage fit into the "Big Story" of God's redemptive work through Jesus?

We encourage you to read each scripture passage mentioned. Take your time working through the devotional; God's word is living and active and never returns void!

ONE

REFUGE: A POWERFUL WORD





W

hat is the first thought that comes to your mind when you hear the word “refuge”? The word “refuge” is seen many times throughout Scripture. At first glance, it’s easy to assume a basic understanding of the word, but it is multi-dimensional with many different applications. Here are some passages mentioning refuge:

REFUGE VERSE

Deuteronomy 33:27 (NIV)

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying “Destroy him!”

Psalm 62:7-8 (NIV)

My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. TRUST in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

Psalm 91:2, 4, 9-11 (NIV)

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”.....He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.....If you make the Most High your dwelling- even the Lord, who is my refuge- then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways...”

MEANING

The Hebrew word for refuge used in this verse shows God as:

Our ultimate refuge

The Hebrew word used for refuge in these verses show refuge as:

Shelter

Hope

Trust

Other verses to read:

Psalms 46:1

Psalms 61:3

Psalm 73:28

Psalms 94:22

Psalms 142:4-7

Proverbs 14:26

Isaiah 4:6

Isaiah 25:4

REFUGE VERSE

2 Samuel 22:1-3;31-37 (NIV)

David sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior- from violent men you save me.....As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your shield of victory; you stoop down to make me great. You broaden the path beneath me so that my ankles do not turn...

MEANING

The Hebrew word used for refuge in these verses show refuge as:

Protection

Psalm 40:4 (NIV)

Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust (refuge) who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.

Jeremiah 17:5a, 7-8 (NIV)

Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on his flesh for strength.....but blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence (refuge) is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

The Hebrew word used for refuge in these verses show refuge as:

Confidence

Security

Psalm 71:1-3 (NIV)

In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame. Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me. Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

The Hebrew word used for refuge in these verses show refuge as:

Dwelling place where one lives
A den of safety

Isaiah 33:15-16 (NIV)

He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil- this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him.

The Hebrew word used for refuge in this verse shows refuge as:

Fortress

Hebrews 6:13-20 (NASB)

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you." 15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. 16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. 17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever...

The Greek word used for refuge in this verse shows refuge as:

Hope

From these verses, a picture is painted for us and tells us that refuge is:

- SHELTER
- WHERE TRUST AND CONFIDENCE CAN BE PLACED
- PROTECTION
- TRUE SECURITY
- A SOLID DWELLING PLACE
- A PLACE OF HOPE

While the word refuge has different meanings, the source is the same: God. He is the ultimate source of refuge and in Him alone can we find our intended dwelling place.



QUESTION TO CONSIDER

What definition of refuge means the most to you today?



TWO

GOD AS REFUGE

One of the most powerful ways to understand the refuge God offers is to understand the purpose of a fortress. In biblical times, a fortress was a physical stronghold with a towering, thick wall designed to keep invading armies from reaching the people. In short, it was designed to keep the threat out and to protect the vulnerable within.

Within a fortress, one of the most essential elements was a good water supply. Scripture describes God as a fortress (Psalm 144:2) and living water (John 4). God as our fortress offers a place of safety where He provides in a way that nothing and no one else can. As living water, God pours into us constantly and consistently.

When we accept the invitation to follow God, we take refuge in Him and become a part of God's family. As a part of God's family, we are able to have the promise of an eternal place of refuge as well as an abundant life here on earth.

Abundant life here is possible, no matter what situation we are in, because:

GOD IS OUR PORTION

He fills the void we all have without him. Therefore, we do not have to fear, and we can trust God despite the circumstances around us.

GOD OFFERS PROTECTION

A woman named Ruth in the Bible went through a very difficult time. She dealt with one blow after another. In the midst of her difficult circumstances, Ruth found refuge under God's wings (Ruth 2:12). Because she took refuge in God, He protected Ruth in unique ways. Not only was she able to overcome her challenges; she was able to thrive.

GOD IS OUR HIDING PLACE

When King David was being chased by his enemies, he hid in a mountaintop refuge, and his life was spared (1 Samuel 23:14). The refuge was fortress of safety that God provided. It was a place of security and an answer to David's prayer (Psalm 57)—a reminder that God sees and knows and cares.

GOD IS OUR COVERING

As our covering, He is a trustworthy place to find shelter in the storms of life. We are sometimes tempted to make other things our covering (money, relationships, career, talents) but will discover that those things, even when they are good, will not be able to sustain us.

GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY

Trust brings confidence. Charles Wesley Naylor, former pastor and prolific hymnwriter, writes:

Trust does not mean shutting our eyes to facts.....Trust looks at things as they are. It sees the dangers that threaten, and assesses them at their true value. It sees the need, and does not try to disguise it. It sees the difficulties, and does not discount them. But seeing all this, it looks beyond and sees God.... It sees him greater than the needs or the dangers or the difficulties, and it does not shrink before them.

GOD IS THE SOLUTION

He is the first place to run, the one who holds all the answers, the one where true refuge can always be found. As the ultimate source of refuge, God is enough. In all things, He is enough. In all circumstances, He is enough. In addition to the abundant life possible here, God has prepared an eternal place of refuge where the broken, messy pieces of this world will be redeemed. No more tears, no more pain; just God's presence and peace (Revelation 21).

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

In what situation could you use a reminder that God is the solution?



family discussion

Gather together and think about what a fortress or refuge might look like. You are probably thinking of a gigantic castle, with huge, thick stone walls surrounded by a moat, and a tall tower right in the middle. If you lived in that castle, you would feel safe and protected! That's what a refuge is: a place where you can feel safe even when there might be trouble around you. It doesn't have to be a castle... a refuge can be ANY place that you feel safe and protected (at home, school or church; under an umbrella; at Mwana!).

Use building blocks or play-doh to make your own refuge and talk about the safe feeling we have from places of refuge.

MARGUERITE'S STORY

Four of Marguerite's ten children have died. From two sets of twins, one from each set passed away due to preventable diseases. When we met Marguerite, she bore deep trauma from years of abuse from her husband (who had abandoned the family), from the loss of her children and from extreme poverty. Over the years, we continued to minister to Marguerite and her family: supplementing food and providing household essentials, providing school supplies and covering school fees for her children, providing water filter and hygiene training to prevent the same diseases that had ravaged their family.

Through all of this, it was evident that true, lasting transformation was not taking root. Over the years, Marguerite continued to practice animism, a religious, occult practice. It was not until Marguerite accepted Christ and His eternal hope for her life that the transformation took place. From the outside, Marguerite's circumstances have not largely changed. Her family is still poor; the family still bears wound from the trauma they have experienced. But there is one thing that is unmistakable: the peace. You can see it in her eyes and in her demeanor. There is hope in spite of circumstances. Marguerite has found refuge in God.



THREE

SHELTER AS REFUGE

Imagine you are at the beach enjoying a beautiful sunny day and a thunderstorm pops up out of nowhere. What do you do? Run for shelter! Shelter is a source of refuge. In the New Testament book of Matthew, Jesus teaches about the difference of a house built on a solid foundation and that which is built on shaky foundation..

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. Matthew 7:24-27

Jesus was using a building illustration to show what happens when a person either puts God's words into practice or ignores them. Within this context, it is important to note what makes the shelter a solid refuge. The house on the rock had a firm foundation and was able to withstand attack. The house built on the sand had a shaky foundation, and it crumbled in the first storm.

The building analogy reminds us that a shelter which provides true refuge:

- Must have a firm foundation
- Must anticipate potential storms
- Must be built intentionally, not haphazardly

While buildings in this world are never indestructible, a solidly built structure is a picture of the firm foundation we find in God and a reminder of how a well-built shelter can be a source of refuge.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

How can seeing God as your solid foundation and a well-built shelter for refuge shape your approach to difficult life circumstances?

family discussion

Gather with your family and describe that same castle with a tall tower. Can you imagine what that tall tower would look like on the inside? What would it smell like? What would it sound like? And what makes that tall tower so sturdy? Because it has a solid foundation! God is just like that tall tower AND that firm foundation! He is the safest place to be in times of trouble. God is our refuge and our strong fortress. He keeps us safe.

What could you use to build a model of a sturdy, strong foundation and a tall tower? Practice with Legos, marshmallows, toothpicks or building blocks!



MAVIE'S STORY

When we learned about six-year-old Mavie, our hearts broke. No child should ever have to face what she faced: abuse and neglect. Mavie joined us at the Mwana Refuge, and for the past several years she has grown into a child full of joy, curiosity, bravery, love and compassion. When we consider the concept of shelter as refuge, it's so much more than a house. In Mavie's former life, there was a roof over her head...but it did not shelter her. Mavie came to know that true shelter is found not only in a home, but in safety, in belonging, in delight, in love.



For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Romans 8:14-17 (NIV)



FOUR

FAMILY AS REFUGE



“**A**doption to sonship...” This phrase and these verses are some of the most powerful in the New Testament. They are often used as a platform to highlight the need for earthly adoption. However, a deeper look at the culture that sparked Paul’s metaphor reveals a broader perspective.

When Paul wrote about adoption, he was referring to the Roman concept of adoption. Roman law allowed a man to create an heir from outside his family. According to author Francis Lyall in his book *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, the reason for legal adoption was never for the sake of the child, but rather for the broader family. **Let that sink in: adoption was to preserve the family.** Since the Roman household was the primary unit for worship, the family needed a male priest at its head to offer prayers and sacrifices. Families that worshipped together were the building blocks of Roman society. **Family was the priority.**

While adoption helped the Romans preserve their earthly families, Paul used the metaphor of adoption to describe a heavenly family, God’s family. In stating “*the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship,*” Paul painted a picture of the powerful love, close relationship and intimacy that is possible between God and those who believe in Him and receive the Holy Spirit. Sonship in Roman culture meant access, identity and inheritance. Paul reveals how those same things are possible in God’s family, with much more valuable and eternal outcomes. Sonship in God’s family means:

ACCESS

Members of God’s family have access to God in the same that way Jesus does, as a Father. God is our dad in every way, and He is the only parent who can give true, internal assurance to EVERY child. Psalm 68:4-5 says, “Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, extol him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before him—his name is the Lord. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling.” These verses remind us that every child has the chance to be a part of a family—the family of God—even if they do not have access to earthly parents.

IDENTITY

In Roman adoption, the adopted child received a new identity. Prior debts were erased, and new rights and responsibilities were taken on. From the standpoint of the Roman family, the adoptee became the same as the adopter. Once the child was adopted, they were a permanent part of the family, and the parents could not disown a child they adopted.

INHERITANCE

Today, we understand that one becomes an heir only after someone's death. However in Roman law, inheritance was something that was a part of life, not something that began at death. This means that all children no matter the age, biological or adopted, were already heirs throughout their father's life. They were joint sharers of his property and possessions. In this sense, the children were fully united with their father. This is the legal background to Paul's words, that 'if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ'" (Rom. 8:17). In other words, "Birth, not death, constituted heirship" (Lyal). One of the most well known verses in Scripture, John 3:16, was part of Jesus's explanation to a man named Nicodemus about what it takes to have "new birth". When we accept Jesus' death on our behalf, we are "born again" and receive a full inheritance. For believers, God confirms that inheritance by the testimony of his Spirit.

From Paul's teaching in Romans, we are reminded that:

- Adoption into God's family means every child has access to a perfect parent who fully knows and loves them. In Him, we have a new identity and an inheritance.
- Adoption into God's family means every child has new rights and responsibilities. Part of our responsibility is to carry on the worshipful lifestyle that was so integral to a family when Paul was writing.
- Adoption into God's family means every child is granted co-ownership of incredible things to come:

It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life. Ephesians 1:11-14 (MSG)

FOR CONSIDERATION

It was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that Romans 8 is often used to highlight earthly adoption. Earthly adoption is a beautiful thing. As wonderful as it is, earthly adoption is not equal to heavenly adoption. Earthly adoption is not the solution for each child, only God is.

When we put earthly adoption on the same level as heavenly adoption, we may unintentionally or subconsciously view ourselves (or someone who adopts) as a “savior” of sorts. Adoption is an option for some children, but it is not the solution for every orphan. God is the solution for each child, and He provides family in Himself. Embracing this reminds us to look to God first, the one true Savior.

Furthermore, we see from Scripture that adoption was ultimately about preserving a family. When a child who would be an orphan has an opportunity to be reunited with their family, or when a vulnerable family can be preserved so that no orphan is created, then God’s intended order is upheld.

INVITATION

The invitation to be a part of God’s family is open to all. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17 (NIV)



QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Romans 10:9 (NIV) says “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

When you do this, it means you are a member of God’s family. If you have not done this, is the Holy Spirit prompting you to make this declaration?

family discussion

Gather together and look at photos of your family. Talk about what it means to have a mom and dad, sisters and brothers, grandparents and cousins. Every family looks different doesn’t it? What if you didn’t have a mom or dad? Would you still be a part of a family? Yes! When we believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord, we become a part of God’s family! He is our perfect Heavenly Father, no matter what our earthly family may look like. He is our refuge and our safe place!

ETHAN'S STORY

Ethan was abandoned by his parents when he was just a newborn. He found shelter at the Mwana Refuge where, he grew and received love. Several months later, we learned of Ethan's grandmother: she was heartbroken to learn of the abandonment of her grandson, and she had been asking the children's judge if she could become Ethan's guardian. This corrupt judge had denied the request, but the grandmother would not give up on her grandson. Today, Ethan is thriving with his grandmother. He remains a part of the Mwana Family, and his story is a testimony to the power of advocacy, the importance of family reunification, and the love of one stubborn grandmother.



FIVE

CHURCH AS REFUGE

In Acts 2, we see the beginning of the church. The picture presented is a group of believers who were united with a common purpose and displayed a “for one another” mindset and lifestyle. They fellowshiped together, learned together, prayed together, ate together, worshipped together and responded to each other’s needs. They displayed for outsiders what Paul later described in 1 Corinthians 12 when he wrote that the church is a body with God as its head. As the head of the body, God leads and guides. As the body, believers are challenged to obey God and work together to demonstrate the love of God in a broken and hurting world. Every part of the body has value, and the body works most effectively when each part does what it is designed to do.

Just as God is refuge, so the church is called to reflect God’s heart and be a source of refuge.

- As God offers **hope**, the church as His body must respond to people who feel hopeless. We enter into places of hopelessness so that the light of God can shine in the darkness.
- As God offers **protection**, the church as His body must protect, advocate for and serve individuals who are overlooked, ignored, burdened and hurting.
- As God is **trustworthy**, the church as His body must be authentic and genuine, putting aside reputation and power.
- As God offers **true security**, the church as His body must demonstrate generosity, showing our confidence is not in the things we have but in the One who gives.

Let’s remember together that churches are not buildings, but a body of people who reflect a God who cares. “And God placed all things under (Jesus’) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” Ephesians 1:22-23 (NIV)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

How can you as a part of the body reflect the heart of God this week?

family discussion

Call out body parts (head, feet, arms, legs, ears, hands). Pass around one piece of paper and have each person in the family draw the body part that was called out. At the end you will have created a very unique looking person! Share with your family that your work of art is a picture of the body of Christ, the church. Just like you all worked together to create something beautiful, we can join with other believers and share our special gifts to show the love of Jesus to the world around us.



VERO'S STORY

Five children whose father had abandoned them were living on the street, watching their critically ill mother, Mama Vero, quickly approach death. We feared that we were about to watch five children become orphans. The response had to be holistic in order to respond to the various critical needs. Vero needed medical care; the children needed school; the family needed shelter; Vero needed trauma counseling; the family needed pastoral care. Each of these needs were met because the body of Christ through the Mwana Family came together. What is more, the response of love, acceptance and belonging was transformational to Vero: because of this love, she came to know her Savior Jesus Christ. Today, Vero is a strong witness to the power of a community of believers, God's church, who come together for the sake of another.



CLOSING

REFUGE WITHIN ORPHANHOOD



A

s a ministry, Mwana seeks to provide “refuge within orphanhood.” To do that, we strive to model “refuge” based on what we see presented in Scripture:

GOD AS REFUGE

- We believe God is the solution for every child. Children at the Mwana Refuge and the vulnerable families we serve hear the Gospel and know that they can be a part of God’s family.
- God is the center of everything we do. He is leading, guiding and directing. The children who are placed in our care are most loved by Him. His love provides the ultimate refuge. The vulnerable women in our care are empowered by Him and thus find a God-given sense of value and worth.

SHELTER AS REFUGE

- The Mwana Refuge is a place of peace, security and comfort for the children. It is a safe space where they find shelter. We hope to offer a place of refuge to many more children and families in need of this in the future.

FAMILY AS REFUGE

- **Through caregivers:** The caregivers at the Mwana Refuge love and build trust with the children. We employ caregivers who seek to give the utmost care to the children and operate with the highest of standards.
- **Through reunification:** When a child comes to the refuge, our hope is reunification with their biological

family whenever possible. When a child can be safely reunited with their family, he or she is going back to what was originally intended.

- **Through earthly adoption:** If reunification is not possible, we explore the possibility of a child being adopted into a new, forever family.

CHURCH AS REFUGE

We believe the body of believers can be a source of refuge. From advocating on behalf of Mwana, to giving generously, to prayer for the people in our care, we see the power of the individual and corporate presence of the church in our midst.



WAYS TO BE INVOLVED WITH MWANA:

ADVOCACY

We would love your help in spreading the word about Mwana.

Follow us on social media (@mwanavillages) and repost what we share.

SHELTER

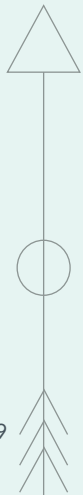
Consider giving a gift to help us finish our permanent Mwana Refuge.

FAMILY

- Prayer for the caregivers, staff and leadership of Mwana
- Prayers for the reunification of families
- Prayers for our adoptive families
- Donations to help us continue the work in those areas

CHURCH

- Talk to your missions/outreach person to set up a meeting with Mari Beth Poor or Wellon Bridgers to learn more about how your church can become a church partnership.
- Share this free resource with your small group or Sunday school class.



TO TAKE A NEXT STEP TO GET MORE INVOLVED
WITH MWANA, CONTACT:

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HOW CAN
YOUR FAMILY
TAKE A NEXT STEP
TO BE INVOLVED
WITH MWANA?

