

CELEBRATING 29 YEARS



200 MILLION SHOEBOXES

SPECIAL REPORT

INSIDE: UKRAINE | THE HIMBA | MONGOLIA | DISCIPLING THE NEXT GENERATION



 **GOOD NEWS. GREAT JOY.**

A NOTE FROM FRANKLIN GRAHAM

DEAR FRIEND,

We give God the glory as we celebrate a historic Operation Christmas Child milestone: 200 million shoebox gifts packed since 1993. I am thankful to God for all the boys and girls around the world who have had an opportunity to hear the Good News that *“whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved”* (Romans 10:13).

Every shoebox prayerfully packed in Jesus’ Name is special. We have seen time and time again how God places just the right gift into the hands of a specific child. This gift is a tangible expression of God’s love for a child in desperate need.

God is using Operation Christmas Child and our discipleship program, The Greatest Journey, to open doors for the Gospel in places where people have never heard about Jesus. As boys and girls receive Jesus as their Savior, many begin sharing their faith with family and friends. Their witness is transforming entire villages and leading to new churches being started.

Thank you for your prayers and your service. We couldn’t do this project without you. May God bless you.

Sincerely,



Franklin Graham
President, Samaritan’s Purse



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FACING PAGE: Samaritan’s Purse President Franklin Graham helped to distribute Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes in Mongolia. **ABOUT THE COVER:** Natalya, who lives in an orphanage in Ukraine, received the 200 millionth shoebox gift.

CELEBRATING

200 MILLION BLESSINGS

By God's grace, Operation Christmas Child reaches a special milestone.

SCAN THE CODE TO WATCH THE VIDEO



We thank God for 200 million shoebox gifts packed and for all the boys and girls around the world who have had an opportunity to hear the Good News that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Gift-filled shoeboxes have been delivered to children in 175 countries and territories since the project started. This would never have been possible without faithful shoebox packers lovingly and prayerfully preparing boxes in Jesus’ Name.

These simple gifts continue to open doors for our local church partners in remote and impoverished communities to share the Gospel with children—many who have never heard about God’s love for them.

A Cross-Country Tour

Elizabeth Groff went on a special journey to help pack the symbolic 200 millionth shoebox gift. Elizabeth, who received a shoebox years ago in an orphanage in Ukraine, traveled to different drop-off locations and processing centers with the shoebox gift to encourage people to continue packing boxes.

Elizabeth participated in the cross-country celebration because she wants people to know that God is using shoebox gifts to demonstrate His love to children who are in desperate need.

“There are so many children out there just like me who have never heard of Jesus or experienced His everlasting love,” she said. “I know the impact a single shoebox can make. It absolutely changed my life. There’s no greater reward than being able to serve through this ministry.”

At each stop along the national tour, Elizabeth added a gift item chosen by voters on our Operation Christmas Child social media platforms. She started her journey by packing a doll in Denver, Colorado, as well as items selected by the Samaritan’s Purse international affiliate offices: a flashlight by the United Kingdom; a reusable canvas bag by Canada; a plush koala toy by Australia/New Zealand; a jump rope by Germany; and a pencil sharpener by Korea.

After visiting Denver, Elizabeth headed to Aurora, Illinois, where she added a necklace. In Nashville, Tennessee, Elizabeth packed colorful socks.

The cross-country celebration continued in Punta Gorda, Florida, where Samaritan’s Purse volunteers were serving in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. Elizabeth thanked disaster relief staff and volunteers for serving as the hands and feet of Jesus. In Florida, she added a water bottle filled with pretty hair ties to the special shoebox.

The tour wrapped up in North Carolina at the Charlotte Processing Center where Samaritan’s Purse President, Franklin Graham, prayerfully dedicated the shoebox. He also added the final item to the 200 millionth gift: a shiny yellow yo-yo.



ABOVE: Elizabeth Groff traveled to drop-off locations and processing centers with the 200 millionth shoebox. At each stop, she added a special gift to the box. **BELOW:** Elizabeth and our disaster relief volunteers pray over the 200 millionth gift.





Charlotte, North Carolina



Charlotte, North Carolina

Elizabeth and her family pack shoeboxes together every year for children in desperate need.

ABOVE: Volunteers help prepare shoebox gifts for international shipment.
RIGHT: Franklin Graham adds a yellow yo-yo to the 200 millionth shoebox gift.



Charlotte, North Carolina

Elizabeth's Story

Elizabeth received her shoebox gift during a time she described as “rock bottom”—when she felt broken.

“I felt alone. I felt lost. That is where Jesus met me. He didn’t leave me there,” she said. “He showed me that He loved me through a simple gift—through a shoebox.”

Elizabeth’s mother turned to alcohol to try to ease her grief after her husband died when Elizabeth was only 1. When she gave birth to baby Tanya she couldn’t properly care for her, and Elizabeth quickly became a mother to her younger sister. When Elizabeth was 7 years old, she decided that she wanted a better life for Tanya. The sisters ran away from home and went to live in an orphanage.

Tanya’s biological father eventually found the girls at the orphanage and took Tanya home with him—but he didn’t take Elizabeth. Heartbroken and alone, the young girl didn’t believe that anyone would love her again.

But that changed when Elizabeth received an Operation Christmas Child shoebox. Her favorite item in her box was a shiny, yellow yo-yo. “It represented love. Someone cared enough to send me this box,” she said. “That shoebox gift was a direct response to my prayers, and it was a beacon of hope. I felt God’s love. He used that box to say to me that I was not an orphan—that I was His daughter.”

An American family adopted Elizabeth when she was 13. She joined her new family in packing 150 Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts that first year. “I had this passion in me to fill more boxes and to share the love that I once received through this gift.”

Elizabeth has never stopped packing boxes. She started a shoebox club at her school and introduced Operation

“I felt alone. I felt lost. That is where Jesus met me. He didn’t leave me there. He showed me that He loved and cared for me through a simple gift—through a shoebox.”

—ELIZABETH

Christmas Child to other teenagers. Then, as a student at Virginia Tech, Elizabeth headed a 300-member shoebox club on campus.

Elizabeth continues to pack shoeboxes with family and friends and shares her incredible story of God’s faithfulness. “No matter where I go, I take Operation Christmas Child with me. I can’t tell my story without the shoebox—that’s where it started.”

Elizabeth’s story of redemption and hope continues to unfold as she recently reunited with Tanya after years of separation. By God’s grace, Elizabeth was even able to help her sister flee the war in Ukraine.



A Special Journey

Elizabeth's journey with the symbolic 200 millionth shoebox gift culminated in war-torn Ukraine. On a bitterly cold and cloudy day, she watched as dozens of children arrived for the outreach event. Displaced and orphaned, they wore the emotional scars of war on their faces. Many had fled from bombardment and occupation in the eastern part of the country, leaving everything behind, including their beloved toys.

Yet, God used Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts to bring joy and the eternal Light of Christ into their lives. After our church partners led a special program that included games, singing, and dancing, the boys and girls sat in rapt attention as the Gospel was presented. When asked if they wanted to invite Jesus into their hearts through repentance and faith, nearly every hand was raised high.

Elizabeth gave the 200 millionth shoebox gift to 8-year-old Natalya, who immediately clung to the yellow flashlight inside of her box. She said that she was excited to have a light to help her not be afraid when she has to run to the basement during air raids.

Other children who also received gift-filled shoeboxes included Yulia's son and daughter. "This was an amazing event," she said. "My children had to leave all of their toys, and I almost never see them happy anymore. My son, Vitaliy, kept begging me for Legos because they are his favorite, and he left them all behind when we fled our home. I am so thankful to God that he received Legos in his shoebox today."

In Ukraine and around the world, millions of children are living in darkness and despair. We praise the Lord

Serving GOD During WAR

Our National Leadership Team in Ukraine continued sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ through Operation Christmas Child—even as war threatened to destroy their country. These are a few of their testimonies:

- *"Samaritan's Purse became a window to help us see the global body of the church."*
- *"It is a very painful time, but it is the best time to preach the Gospel."*
- *"The Lord is the same today, yesterday, and forever."*
- *"God sees the end, and I trust Him."*
- *"We feel God's care and protection so close to us."*
- *"The Lord is faithful and He's always with us."*
- *"The Ukrainian churches are led by the Holy Spirit."*

for the way He is using simple shoebox gifts to bring them happiness and hope now and for eternity through the Greatest Gift of All, Jesus Christ.

"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Above: Franklin Graham met with Natalya (above and bottom right), who received the 200 millionth shoebox gift. **Below: Our local church partners** in Ukraine prepare for an outreach event.

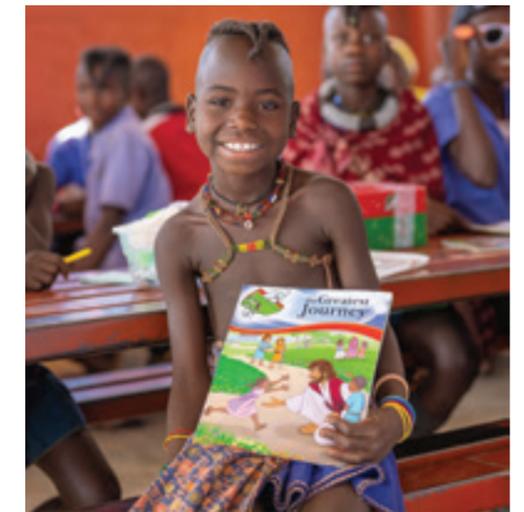




Children listen to The Greatest Journey Bible lessons that were translated into Himba and made available on solar-powered MP3 players.

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

God is using Operation Christmas Child and The Greatest Journey to bring the Gospel to an unreached people group in southern Africa.



The Himba are nomadic livestock farmers who live in small mud huts without electricity or running water. They don't have a written language, so the Himba are oral storytellers who often fill their days with singing and chanting. They worship and pray to their ancestors and trust in local witch doctors for healing. Reaching the nearest town from a Himba village may require several hours of walking. Himba families are often plagued by poverty to the point that it's not uncommon for children to eat only one meal a day. The Himba have been a largely forgotten people for many years. That is, until God burdened the heart of a pastor to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ where it had never been—to the Himba in Namibia.

An Answer to Prayer

Pastor Rizera Hipakua has done some hard things. He endured ridicule from his family after becoming a Christian. He obeyed God's call to devote his life to the pastorate, even though it meant financial uncertainty.

But taking the Gospel to people who had never heard the Name of Jesus would be his hardest challenge yet. Would the Himba allow him into their villages? How would he explain the Gospel to people who worshipped the spirits of their ancestors?

Pastor Rizera and his church members were in the middle of a week of prayer and fasting, asking God how to begin outreach among the Himba, when an individual came to the church to share about a Samaritan's Purse project called Operation Christmas Child.



Pastor Rizera had prayed for God to help him reach the Himba people with the Gospel. Operation Christmas Child and The Greatest Journey became the answer to his prayers.

"It became the answer from God. Operation Christmas Child opened a door and helped us to become friends with the Himba," Pastor Rizera said.

The first Himba village that Pastor Rizera visited with Operation Christmas Child was in Ombaka. He invited church members and local believers to help him with the outreach event. They distributed shoebox gifts, presented the Gospel, and invited the children to participate in The Greatest Journey, the Samaritan's Purse follow-up discipleship program for shoebox recipients.

A number of children and adults in Ombaka came to saving faith in Jesus Christ as a result of this initial shoebox outreach event and The Greatest Journey. "God breathed new life into them. They are a new creation," Pastor Rizera said.

Starting Churches

The Ombaka community was so eager to continue learning about God that they started gathering regularly under a large tree in the village for worship and prayer.

After bringing the Gospel to Ombaka, Pastor Rizera and his team went to Otutati village, where the people eagerly received the Good News through Operation Christmas Child and The Greatest Journey. They, too, started meeting regularly for worship and prayer.

Samaritan's Purse has helped to construct buildings in both Ombaka and Otutati villages so that the believers can gather even during extreme weather conditions.

"A borehole of Living Water—this is the church," Pastor Rizera said. "They will never find it anywhere else. People were in darkness—now they are living in the Light of Christ."

Lives Transformed

Kappa is a young mother who came to the Otutati church during a difficult time. Her family had paid the local witch doctor a large sum of money, but she still struggled to walk. There was no answer for the mysterious illness that had plagued her for months.

"The church encouraged me to pray," Kappa said. "I started to become stronger and stronger."

Kappa began regularly attending church and, after hearing the Gospel and learning about God's love for her, gave her life to Jesus Christ. One of her daughters also came to faith in Jesus after attending the church.

Another villager, Kuyeuua, also gave his life to Christ after going to church. He had been desperate to stop drinking alcohol but couldn't find a way out. "My life was changed by hearing the words they were preaching," he said.

Kuyeuua shared the Gospel with his wife, and she became a Christian, too. Kuyeuua went from knowing nothing about God to serving as church pastor in Ombaka. "I was in prison—but now I'm not," he said. "I feel like I'm actually having a life now."

Pastor Rizera and the team continue hosting outreach events and teaching The Greatest Journey in Himba villages, and believers in some of these villages are now gathering regularly for prayer, worship, and teaching from God's Word.

More people have joined Pastor Rizera in his efforts to reach the Himba, as he now leads a regional Operation Christmas Child team.

"We pray that the church will grow strong and take the Gospel out," Pastor Rizera said. "Let God give them courage and eyes to see others who need to hear the Gospel."

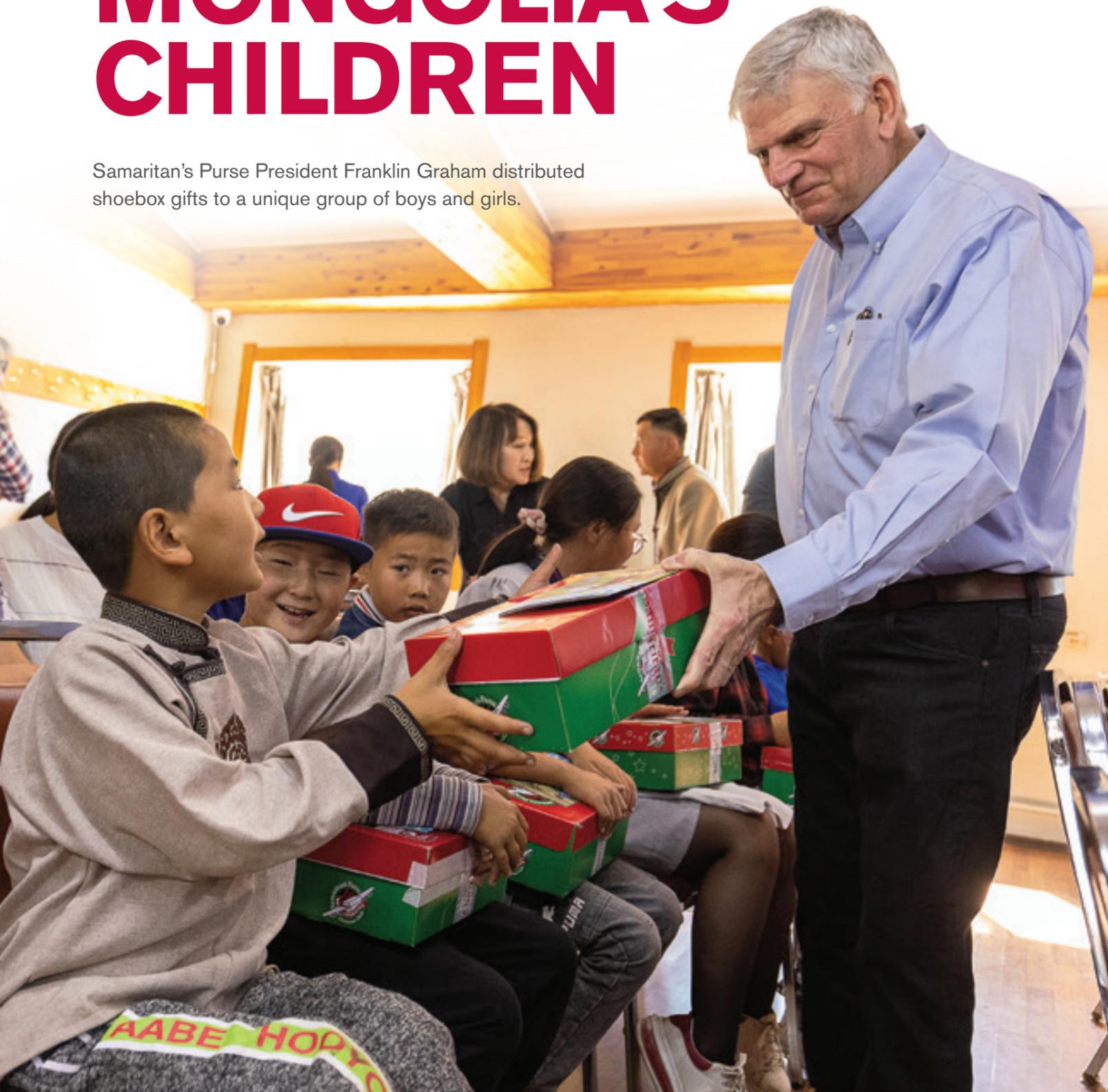


Himba children in Namibia once followed their cultural traditions of ancestor worship. Now, they are coming to faith in Jesus and sharing the Gospel with their families. We praise God that several churches have been started among the Himba as a result of Operation Christmas Child, The Greatest Journey, and the faithful witness of Pastor Rizera and his team.



GOOD NEWS and GREAT JOY FOR MONGOLIA'S CHILDREN

Samaritan's Purse President Franklin Graham distributed shoebox gifts to a unique group of boys and girls.



Franklin Graham did the 1-2-3 countdown before the children opened their Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts. He told the boys and girls: “Do you know God loves you? You’re very special to Him. We’re giving you a gift in God’s Name. This comes from Him.”

As the children listen to the Gospel presentation, you wouldn’t know just by looking at them that for almost a third of them, their lives hung in the balance not long before. Faces that had once been blue from lack of oxygen now lit up with joy when they opened their shoebox gift full of toys, school supplies, and personal care items.

Among the children who attended this outreach event in Mongolia were Children’s Heart Project beneficiaries who had received critically needed cardiac surgery. Samaritan’s Purse provides transportation for the child and a parent or guardian and arranges for an interpreter to accompany them. Surgeries are made possible by partnerships with hospitals and medical personnel in North America and Grand Cayman who volunteer their services.

We’ve assisted more than 1,400 children since Children’s Heart Project began in 1997, with about 400 of those from Mongolia.

For 12-year-old Erdembayar, who received heart surgery in South Carolina in 2019, the shoebox gift

reminded him of God’s great care for him. One of the gifts he received inside his box was a harmonica. Erdembayar had never seen one before, so Graham took time to sit beside him and show him to play.

“It’s a way of God saying He loves me,” Erdembayar said of his shoebox.

Erdembayar had accepted Jesus as his Savior and Lord while recovering from surgery in the United States. Now back in Mongolia, he and his mother faithfully attend church. They traveled 12 hours from their home to be at the event with Graham.

Ariunbayar, 10, also received a shoebox gift. He said his favorite items were a golf ball, tennis ball, and Legos. “This is the gift Jesus sent me from Heaven.”

Operation Christmas Child is opening doors for the Gospel in a country where Christians are scarce and Buddhism and cults are common. We pray that God continues using shoebox gifts and The Greatest Journey to bring salvation to children, families, and communities throughout Mongolia.

This year, more than 50,000 children in Mongolia will hear the Good News of Christ through more than 400 outreach events. Since 1996, about 950,000 of the nation’s children have received shoebox gifts and heard the message of eternal hope.



During Operation Christmas Child outreach events, boys and girls in Mongolia were reminded that God loves them and has a plan for their lives. Many of these children had received life-saving cardiac procedures through our Children’s Heart Project.

AROUND THE WORLD

A simple gift offered in Jesus' Name is powerful. Gift-filled shoeboxes are tangible expressions of God's love for boys and girls who are hurting and in desperate need of joy and hope. We praise the Lord for our partnership with local churches across the globe so that children, families, and communities have the opportunity to hear the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



FIJI



UKRAINE



NAMIBIA



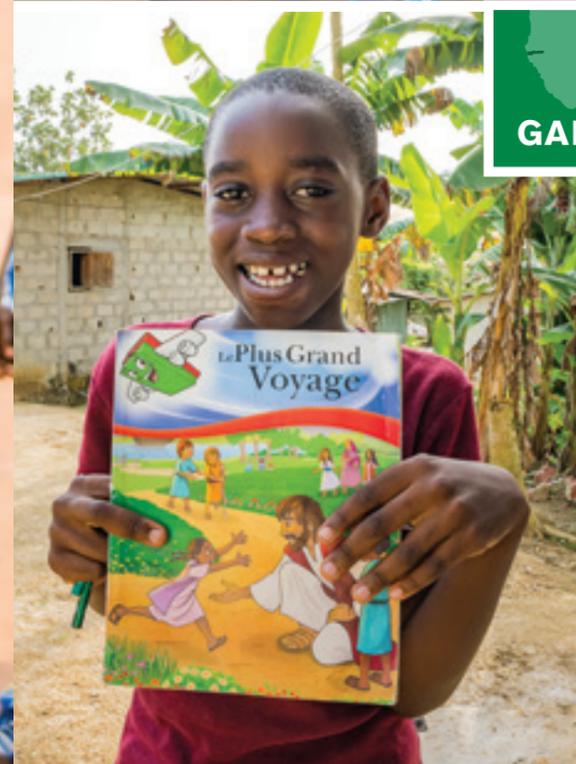
BENIN



SURINAME



GABON





ROMANIA



MONGOLIA



BRINGING THE GOSPEL TO THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Children on isolated island nations are hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ for the first time.

A shoebox gift is more than the special toys and items packed inside—it’s a tangible expression of God’s love. This year, we continued our mission of delivering gift-filled shoeboxes to boys and girls on remote Pacific islands.

Through this initiative, our teams are using shoebox gifts and *The Greatest Journey* as tools to “proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15, ESV). To date, children on over 960 inhabited Pacific islands have received shoeboxes and have had an opportunity to respond to the Gospel of Christ.

Kwajalein Atoll is a part of the Marshall Islands, a nation located between Hawaii and Indonesia. It’s home to about 11,000 people scattered across 100 small islands. Situated on a more than 1,000-square-mile coral reef and featuring one of the world’s largest lagoons, Kwajalein Atoll is an isolated place at the ends of the earth that even boats find tricky to access.

“We had a very rough sail, and when we got inside the lagoon it was not great weather or anchorage, but we felt safe,” said Katie, an Operation Christmas Child partner and missionary to the Marshall Islands. She sailed to Kwajalein with her husband, Scott, the ketch captain.

When they reached the island of Mejjatto, another smaller boat shuttled them ashore with cartons of shoeboxes. They held an outreach event in which they shared the

Gospel and distributed 96 shoebox gifts that were packed with care by people from around the world. Moved by the stories from Scripture and the love demonstrated by the team, a number of children prayed to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

The next day, Katie and the team visited neighboring Ebadon, known as the forgotten island. The boat shuttle owner had warned them that they only had five hours to get in and out during high tide. Otherwise, the water level gets too low for even the shuttle to travel because the reef is so large.

Undeterred by time constraints, the team loaded the shoebox gifts onto the shuttle and set off to serve the island

Operation Christmas Child outreach events include a Gospel presentation led by local leaders.



Children are learning how to pray and to trust God with every need that they have.

with a population of just 74. They were warmly welcomed and escorted to the school where the outreach event was held. Again, the team shared God’s love, distributed fun-filled shoebox gifts, and invited the boys and girls to participate in *The Greatest Journey*.

A Testimony of Faith

Conrad and KD are brothers who received shoeboxes and joined *The Greatest Journey*. They rushed home after every discipleship class to share with their parents what they had learned, and the boys invited them to the graduation ceremony.

Drawing from what they learned during *The Greatest Journey*, the brothers led their father to salvation in Jesus Christ. Two weeks later, their father passed away suddenly. Yet, even in the aftermath of tragedy, Conrad and KD found comfort in knowing that they would one day be reunited with their father in Heaven.

As Conrad, KD, and their mother grieved their devastating loss, they read from the Bible the boys received during the graduation ceremony and experienced the encouragement and healing that only comes from God’s Word.

We praise God for the children, families, and communities throughout the Pacific islands who are being transformed by God’s Word and His steadfast love.



These children live in Fiji, one of the countries we are reaching through our efforts in the Pacific islands. For many children on these remote islands, their shoebox is the first gift they have ever received.

THE GREATEST JOURNEY

DISCIPLING THE NEXT GENERATION

Boys and girls are being transformed by the Gospel through The Greatest Journey discipleship program.

Millions of children are beginning a new life in Jesus Christ as they join The Greatest Journey and learn what it means to follow their Lord and Savior. Through this 12-lesson follow-up discipleship program for shoebox recipients, more than 2.4 million boys and girls made decisions for Christ in 2022.

These classes are taught by hundreds of thousands of local believers who have been trained by Samaritan's Purse and volunteer their time to bring the hope of the Gospel to children in need.

After completing The Greatest Journey, children attend a graduation celebration and receive a certificate. Most importantly, they are given a Bible, and it is often the first copy of God's Word the child has owned.

Trusting God

About an hour west of Abidjan, the largest city in Cote d'Ivoire, is the small fishing community of Dabou. Roads become nearly impassable during rainy season, leaving the town largely unreachable.

Fishermen from the nearby country of Benin sell their catch in Dabou. Along with their goods, however, they also bring voodoo worship practices, which has created a strong resistance to the Gospel in Dabou.

Samuel had always maintained and cared for his family's voodoo sanctuary. But he questioned everything he had been raised to believe after he attended an Operation Christmas Child outreach event hosted by a small church outside of Dabou. Samuel joined 50 other children at the event, and many of them also enrolled in The Greatest Journey.

After learning about God during the discipleship lessons, Samuel told his parents that he no longer wanted to continue voodoo worship. Although his parents insisted that he would die if he stopped practicing voodoo, Samuel prayed to Jesus for strength and protection.

The following night, four voodoo sanctuaries in the community burned to the ground due to an electrical short circuit.

The faithfulness of the small church outside of Dabou led Samuel's community to witness God's mighty power. Now about 25 adults and children in Samuel's village are meeting regularly and worshipping God.



These children in Suriname proudly show the Bibles and certificates they received after graduating from The Greatest Journey discipleship program.



Boys and girls in Benin are hearing for the first time about the eternal hope and salvation that is found in Jesus Christ.



Local believers who have been trained by Samaritan's Purse teach children in Romania about God and the Bible during The Greatest Journey.

Teaching Others

Yasinah had never attended church or heard anything about God until she participated in an Operation Christmas Child outreach event. After hearing about how God loved her, died for her sins, and wanted to have a relationship with her, Yasinah committed her life to Him.

She then enrolled in The Greatest Journey, where she learned how to follow Jesus Christ and how to grow in her relationship with Him. Yasinah enjoyed the classes so much that she wondered if she could one day become a teacher and help other children learn about God.

Now, years later, Yasinah and Vola—the teacher who invited her to the outreach event—lead a children's club together called "Famonjena," which means "salvation." Yasinah was also trained on how to teach The Greatest Journey, and she is fulfilling a dream as she helps children learn what it means to have a relationship with Jesus Christ and to live for His glory.

"I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6, ESV).

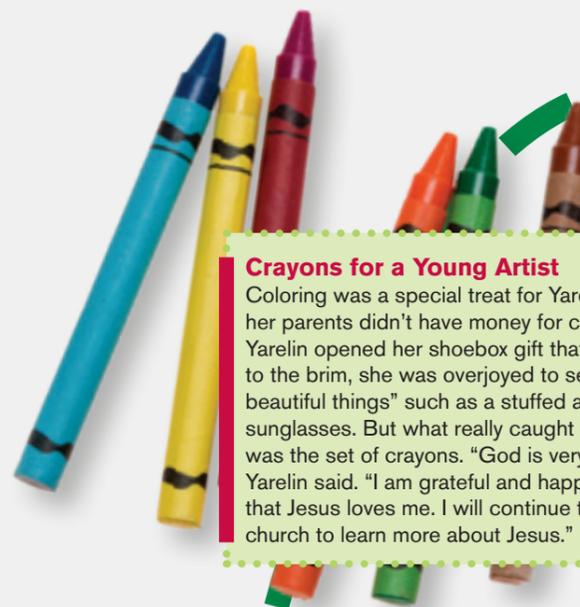
ANSWERED PRAYERS

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations” (Ephesians 3:20-21).



God Provides a Doll

Kangeloo desperately wanted a doll. Her imagination had become her companion as she would carry around a large stone and pretend that it was her doll, her friend. Kangeloo's mother, Nagee, was overwhelmed with joy as she watched her daughter hold the doll that was packed inside of her shoebox. "This is her first time to receive toys," she said. "I'm so very happy."



Crayons for a Young Artist

Coloring was a special treat for Yarelin, because her parents didn't have money for crayons. When Yarelin opened her shoebox gift that was filled to the brim, she was overjoyed to see "many beautiful things" such as a stuffed animal and sunglasses. But what really caught her attention was the set of crayons. "God is very good," Yarelin said. "I am grateful and happy to know that Jesus loves me. I will continue to come to church to learn more about Jesus."



Lighting the Way Home

Almir had to walk several miles to school every day. By the time he headed home after school, he was making the journey in the dark. Almir was so excited to find a flashlight in his shoebox gift that would make the long walk easier and safer.



Praying for a Towel

Vetegea had been pleading with her mother for a bath towel. But her mother didn't have money to spare, so Vetegea prayed for God to provide a towel. Vetegea was thrilled when she opened her shoebox gift and saw a pink towel—a tangible answer to prayer for a little girl in a remote, impoverished village in Africa who trusted God.



A Soccer Ball for Randy

Although basketball and volleyball are the sports of choice in the Marshall Islands, Randy likes soccer the best. He wanted to learn to play and asked his mother for a soccer ball, but she couldn't find one anywhere on their island. Randy was so excited to find both a soccer ball and pump inside his shoebox gift that was lovingly packed in Jesus' Name.



Father and Son Are Blessed

Dervins' father repairs bicycles to scrape together a living for his family in Colombia. Dervins likes to help his father with these repairs after school. When he received a shoebox gift, he knew something special was inside, as the box was quite heavy. Among the toys and school supplies in the box was a set of tools, perfect for him and his father to use in repairing bicycles.



Sandals for a Refugee

A child who fled the conflict in Ukraine with her family had to leave all her personal belongings behind. Once the family was safe in nearby Slovakia, the young girl was invited to an Operation Christmas Child outreach event. Before the shoebox gifts were distributed, she told the local team that what she wanted more than anything was a pair of sandals. God knew the desire of her heart and provided just what she needed.

Grateful for a Harmonica

Larry had never received a present of any kind until he was invited to an Operation Christmas Child outreach event. When he opened his shoebox gift, he couldn't believe what was included—a harmonica, the very toy he'd been wanting for a long time. "This is the greatest gift ever," he said.



SHOEBOX PACKERS SEND

GOD'S LOVE THROUGH SIMPLE GIFTS

Boys and girls around the world are hearing the Gospel because shoeboxes are packed in Jesus' Name.

Drive down River Styx Road just outside Wadsworth, Ohio, and you'll come across the "Styx and Stones Farm" sign. Pull in the driveway on any given Saturday morning in the fall, and it will be tough to find a parking spot. On one edge of the driveway sits a barn that's at least 175 years old. Inside are strands of lights hung from the ceiling; tables bearing scores of toys, school supplies, and other fun items; and a pile of red-and-green shoeboxes stacked high against a wall.

For two hours each Saturday, people from the community come to assemble cardboard shoeboxes, write notes to the boys and girls who will receive them, and pack the boxes with items that will delight their hearts.

In 2022, Matt and Kristel Stone—grain farmers born and raised in Wadsworth—hosted about 40 events like this in their barn with more than 1,000 people attending. The community came together to pack 5,000 Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts.

Matt and Kristel transformed their barn into a staging area for shoebox packing a few years ago as a way to honor Matt's mom, Jennie, who died



of multiple myeloma. Jennie loved packing shoebox gifts, and before she died, she asked her family to continue packing.

Word quickly spread in the community about how the Stones were opening the barn for people to come and pack shoeboxes. They packed 1,084 shoebox gifts that first year.

"They're coming to the barn to put together something and be a part of something that's much larger than them," Matt said. "They get to see the work of the Gospel in real time and maybe in a different way."

At every packing event, the Stones invite people back to the farm and to their home if ever a need arises. Through these invitations, they've gained new friends, some of whom have come to Christ and been baptized.



An old barn that once sat empty is now a staging area for families in Wadsworth, Ohio, to pack their gift-filled shoeboxes.



Ava, age 9, has inspired her family and friends to prepare Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes. Ava prays over every box that she packs.

A Family Inspired

Ava Smith packed her first shoebox gift three years ago at her Christian school in Felton, Delaware. Ava, 9, went home and told her parents and younger brother how much fun she had packing her box.

Her family quickly caught the vision for reaching children around the world in this way, not only with fun toys and practical items, but with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the fall of 2019, they packed five shoeboxes as a family.

But Ava had a heart to make an even greater impact in the lives of boys and girls in need. She set a goal for her family to pack 100 shoeboxes the following year. Together with friends, Ava's goal was surpassed, with 109 boxes prayerfully prepared.

"It made me happy because we're spreading God's

Word to people who have never heard of Jesus," Ava said. "It's important that they know He loves them."

Ava started selling snacks at yard sales to help buy quality items to fill shoeboxes. Then she had the idea of creating and selling T-shirts with unique designs, such as a drawing of sheep inspired by Psalm 23:1. Ava created the drawing and a local artist at a print shop refined it a bit and came up with the final design. Other creative T-shirts soon followed.

Ava has used funds from the shirt sales to purchase "wow" items, such as stuffed animals and soccer balls with pumps, as well as toothbrushes, sunglasses, soap, washcloths, crayons, and coloring books.

Ava's family prays over every shoebox they pack. Ava's prayer is that "the children who receive the boxes will come to know God and know that He loves them."

CALLED TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

A church in Florida continues to give after Hurricane Ian.

New Life in Christ Church has been an Operation Christmas Child drop-off location for many years, and the staff and congregation weren't about to let a storm prevent them from participating this year. "I didn't even entertain the thought of not being a drop-off location this year," said Debbie Harrington, the



Although their Punta Gorda community was hit hard by Hurricane Ian, New Life Church remained faithful to packing shoeboxes and to serving as a drop-off location.

Debbie Harrington is committed to spreading the Gospel by packing shoeboxes for children around the world.



church's drop-off team coordinator. "As Franklin Graham reminds us, God has called us to share the Good News."

It would have been easy—and understandable—if New Life decided to focus inward after Hurricane Ian's devastating punch. The Category 4 storm thrashed Punta Gorda, Florida, in late September. Several buildings on the church campus were badly damaged, as were the homes of the pastoral team and church members.

The church decided to embrace this difficult time and used it as an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They partnered with Samaritan's Purse to do this in two ways: by serving as a drop-off location for Operation Christmas Child during National Collection Week and as a host church for a U.S. Disaster Relief team.

Angela Hinchman, one of the New Life pastors, said that the church is committed to sharing God's love.

"Kids in need didn't disappear because a hurricane blew through Punta Gorda. If we are so focused on ourselves, then we miss the chance to share the Gospel to the nations and miss out on participating in the Great Commission. People need to know that you care and love them and that you are going to show up. And a shoebox is a great way to do that."

Debbie feared that not many shoeboxes would be collected because of the storm. She was thrilled when the final shoebox total received at the New Life drop-off site was more than 1,000.

"Samaritan's Purse disaster relief volunteers are attending our church and have taken shoeboxes from the church," she said. "They're shopping in their free time and packing boxes and then bringing them back. It's amazing and it's all God. He's reassuring us that He will take care of us and that He's in control."

PACKING A SHOEBOX WILL 'MAKE YOUR HEART FEEL GOOD'

Sallie Simmons shares God's love through Operation Christmas Child.

Sallie Simmons describes herself as "96 years young." She hasn't slowed down one bit since she began packing Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes about 25 years ago at Stanton Memorial Baptist Church in Miami, Florida.

"A box may go to a child who has never had a gift. It shows them that someone in the world loves them. That can change a life," Sallie said.

Sallie shops year-round for the items that she'll include in her boxes so that they're ready when National Collection Week arrives in November. She gets excited thinking about all the shoebox gifts that end up with children in hard-to-reach areas of the world. "Those boxes go to the ends of the earth to tell others about Jesus," she said. "If you haven't ever packed one, try it. I'm telling you; it will make your heart feel good."

Sallie leads the Operation Christmas Child project at Stanton Memorial, which also serves as a shoebox drop-off location. She is committed to serving in her church and telling others about Jesus—especially through Operation Christmas Child.

"It's a ministry near and dear to my heart. Pack a box and introduce a child to Christ."

Sallie has always wanted to volunteer at an Operation Christmas Child processing center and she finally got to do that in Boone, North Carolina.

"This was on my bucket list. I love this; it's amazing," she said. "I hope the Lord allows me to be here next year and to do this a second time. As long as God gives me the strength and energy, I'm going to work for Him until He calls me home."

Sallie enjoyed seeing "behind the scenes" what it takes for shoeboxes to be prepared for international shipment. The boxes she helped process are going to boys and girls in South Africa as tangible expressions of God's love. Throughout the week, Sallie joined the other volunteers in praying often for the children who would soon receive the gifts the volunteers had processed.

"Some people have never heard who Jesus is and they don't know the love of Jesus. This is why we pack boxes—to tell others about Jesus. We were told to go and make disciples."



At age 96, Sallie Simmons still faithfully serves God. She is the project leader at her church and, for the first time this year, helped to process and prepare shoeboxes for international shipment.

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Children come to faith in Jesus through shoebox gifts.

The classroom was quiet as boys and girls opened their Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes. There were no squeals of excitement or chattering, no shouting for friends to come and look at the fun gifts inside their shoebox.

Yet, their smiles were so big and bright that verbal expressions weren't needed to reveal the joy overflowing from their hearts.

"It moved my soul seeing them happy. It's like I got a gift for myself," said Klaudia, who teaches the group of deaf children in Opuwo, Namibia.

Klaudia was excited for her students to participate in Operation Christmas Child because she wanted them to learn about the Gospel and to know that they are precious in God's sight. "They felt loved today," she said.

Klaudia's class is the only option for deaf children in Opuwo to receive an education unless they travel nearly 10 hours to the capital—which isn't an option for these impoverished families. Some students come to her as teenagers having spent their lives feeling alone because they were unable to communicate with family and friends.

Kavari is just one of many students who received a gift-filled shoebox. He was thrilled to see all the gifts packed inside his Operation Christmas Child shoebox,



Kavari came to faith in Jesus Christ after the Gospel presentation and reading the Bible stories in *The Greatest Gift* booklet he received with his shoebox.

especially the soccer ball. Yet, it wasn't a toy that excited him the most—it was *The Greatest Gift* storybook. In addition to hearing the Gospel before they receive their shoebox gift, boys and girls also receive this booklet that shares 11 Scripture stories and invites children to follow Christ.

Just one day after the outreach event, Kavari was already eagerly sharing the stories in his book. "I'm so happy to get the booklet," he said. "I learned about creation, how we should love one another, and how the kids in the Bible were excited to see God."

The stories in the booklet had quickly become more than stories to Kavari—he knew they were God's truth. "I decided to follow Jesus," he said.

Kavari said he is excited about going to church and sharing his faith with others. "I want others to accept Jesus into their life."

Deaf children are learning about God and the Bible for the first time through Operation Christmas Child.



Best Friends Become Sisters in Christ

Kemi was so excited after the Operation Christmas Child outreach event that she invited her friend, Gladys, to attend another event a few days later. Kemi had received Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior at the event and she wanted Gladys to experience the same joy.

Gladys accepted her friend's invitation. She had never heard the Gospel before the outreach event. Her family lives in Benin and they prayed to idols for good health, good crops, and anything else they needed.

Benin's history as a kingdom is well known by school children, so the idea of God's Kingdom immediately piqued Gladys' attention during the Gospel presentation.

"They talked about the Kingdom of God," she said. "I understood then that God has a Kingdom. He is inviting me into His Kingdom. I received Him into my heart."

Gladys and Kemi also participated in *The Greatest Journey* and together these best friends learned what it means to follow Jesus Christ in faith and obedience.

We praise God that Gladys' parents and siblings also received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior after hearing her testimony of faith.

"The LORD is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2).

Kemi and Gladys live in Benin, where many people worship idols. But after hearing about Jesus during an outreach event and *The Greatest Journey* discipleship lessons, they now have the eternal hope of the Gospel in their hearts.





THE WORLD NEEDS MORE GOOD SAMARITANS

Join Samaritan's Purse as we answer Christ's call to help those who are hurting due to war, poverty, natural disasters, disease, and famine.

See how we work around the world to relieve suffering and share the hope of the Gospel:

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2022 | COLLECTION TOTALS

HERE'S WHERE YOUR GIFTS ARE GOING



- | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| ALBANIA | COTE D'IVOIRE | LESOTHO | REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO |
| ANGOLA | CROATIA | LIBERIA | ROMANIA |
| ARGENTINA | DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO | LITHUANIA | SENEGAL |
| ARMENIA | DOMINICAN REPUBLIC | MACEDONIA | SERBIA |
| BAHAMAS | ECUADOR | MADAGASCAR | SIERRA LEONE |
| BELARUS | EGYPT | MALAWI | SLOVAKIA |
| BELIZE | EL SALVADOR | MALI | SOLOMON ISLANDS |
| BENIN | EQUATORIAL GUINEA | MEXICO | SOUTH AFRICA |
| BOLIVIA | ESTONIA | MOLDOVA | SOUTH SUDAN |
| BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA | ESWATINI | MONGOLIA | SURINAME |
| BOTSWANA | FIJI | MONTENEGRO | TANZANIA |
| BRAZIL | GAMBIA | MOZAMBIQUE | THAILAND |
| BULGARIA | GEORGIA | NEW CALEDONIA | TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO |
| BURKINA FASO | GHANA | NICARAGUA | TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS |
| BURUNDI | GUATEMALA | NIGER | TUVALU |
| CAMBODIA | GUINEA | NIGERIA | UKRAINE |
| CAMEROON | GUINEA BISSAU | PANAMA | VANUATU |
| CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC | GUYANA | PAPUA NEW GUINEA | VENEZUELA |
| CHAD | HAITI | PARAGUAY | VIETNAM |
| CHILE | HONDURAS | PERU | ZAMBIA |
| COLOMBIA | JAMAICA | PHILIPPINES | |
| COMOROS | KENYA | POLAND | |
| COSTA RICA | LATVIA | | |

PLUS 21 HARD-TO-REACH COUNTRIES

(Names not included for security reasons. Many of those shoeboxes were built online.)





Operation Christmas Child® is a project of Samaritan's Purse®. | Franklin Graham, President
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Liberia

VOLUNTEER YEAR-ROUND with Operation Christmas Child®

You can participate in spreading the Gospel around the world just by serving in your community with one of our local Area Teams. Positions include:

- Leadership
- Church Relations
- Logistics
- Community Relations
- Media Relations
- Prayer Mobilization
- Administrative Support
- Student Relations



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Samaritan's Purse®
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STAMP



MAKING DISCIPLES THROUGH THE GREATEST JOURNEY



Matthew 28:19

Nayara lives in Peru and came to faith in Jesus Christ during The Greatest Journey, our follow-up discipleship and evangelism course for children who receive Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts. Nayara was so excited to share with her parents the Bible stories she had learned. She also told them how they, too, could repent of their sins and put their trust in Christ. We praise God that Nayara's parents also received Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Nayara is just one of millions of children who have participated in The Greatest Journey. As boys and girls learn to faithfully follow Jesus and to share their faith with family and friends, entire communities are being transformed by the Gospel!

You can send a child on The Greatest Journey for just \$6. This helps provide teacher training, as well as a course book, New Testament, and graduation certificate for each child.

To learn more and apply, visit samaritanspurse.org/volunteerwithOCC

Fill out the opposite side and return using the attached envelope, or go to samaritanspurse.org/tgj

