

ONE VOICE

TOGETHER IN PRAYER FOR AN **END TO POVERTY**

New life is a precious gift: helping pregnant refugees access healthcare

Refugees are some of the world's most vulnerable people. Yet they often face barriers that make them unable to access healthcare. In Colombia, Tearfund is working with healthcare providers to make sure pregnant refugee women get all the support they need.

Many of these women are refugees from Venezuela. With few jobs, food shortages and soaring living costs because of the ongoing political and economic crisis, they feel they have no choice but to flee.

Undernourished and under supported

Tearfund is partnering with a local charity, Profamilia, to enable refugee women to receive prenatal care. The mothers are given newborn kits containing essentials that help new babies thrive. Training is on hand to help them adapt to motherhood and keep their babies healthy.

Genesis, one of the women we are supporting, had been turned away from several other doctors before accessing this care. 'Thank God for the support you have given me... I had been walking and walking, asking around but the doctors did not want to see me. 'Now that I've had my first check-up I feel good, I feel safer because they are taking care of me... I feel good because everything is well, thank God.'

Breaking down barriers

Many of the women Tearfund is helping are far along into their pregnancies. They have never had an ultrasound and also are suffering from malnutrition. They have been reluctant to seek help because of the costs involved. These women often cannot afford the cost to travel to the doctors, let alone pay for the prenatal check-ups they need.

The consequences of refugees not having access to healthcare puts the mother's and baby's health at risk, and can even lead to their tragic deaths. Tearfund is working hard to turn this around. By increasing access to healthcare for these women, we can help them to give their babies the best start in life.

Please pray

God of new life,
We thank you that every child is a gift from you. We pray for your favour over these women and their babies – may they be protected and flourish.

We thank you that nothing is outside of your control. We pray that you will remove barriers that stop refugees from accessing healthcare – may you sway leaders to create policies that put vulnerable people first.

Amen.

A note from...

'Helping Venezuelan refugee women receive care during pregnancy and childbirth has helped save many lives of both mothers and babies. Tearfund is not only providing direct aid but is also lobbying for the Colombian state to support pregnant refugee women, and training the churches to provide emotional and spiritual support to this population. Please keep these women in your prayers.'

Rosa Carmargo De Bravo, Head of Latin America and Caribbean Team

Putting power into girls' palms: a story about small things

'Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.' (Mother Teresa)

The smallest things can make the greatest difference. Little life details have the potential to bring – or remove – great strength. Perhaps the small things Mother Teresa was talking about are our thoughts, our choices, our everyday actions and interactions – our moments spent in prayer in the midst of the giant storms of life. But what she was saying has a wider truth in it.

Sometimes, the small things that can make or break an entire life, future, generation or community, are immensely practical items. A clean sanitary towel, an item small enough to put in the palm of a girl's hand, can be the difference between her getting an education, or getting none. The difference between her being able to get a job, or being trapped in poverty. The difference between her having dignity, or experiencing shame.

Meet 17-year-old Takudzwa. 'My name is Takudzwa. I live in Ngangu township [in Zimbabwe] – a famous location which was the epicentre of Cyclone Idai.

'Our lives were devastated during and after the cyclone. It took time to recover and the disturbing thing about being a girl was the lack of basic sanitaryware to manage our menstruation during the disaster.

'My mother and father separated when I was nine years, and I grew up with my mother. We lost all our clothes during the cyclone, and it was difficult for us girls to manage our menstrual hygiene. The cyclone did not give us a chance to gather our few belongings as it hit us during the night. We were left with only the clothes that we were wearing.'

Cycles of poverty

Part of the biology of a young woman's development is the body's preparation to try to make space for the creation of a new human being. With that, though, comes a whole world of very specifically female pain.

The physical discomfort of monthly cycles – which can be anything from mild to debilitating. The emotional and physical pain associated with having, or indeed not having, babies. Each woman's experience is slightly different, and yet, in many ways, essentially the same. For most girls and women, from some point in their adolescent years, there will be regular periods of time in which having access, or not having access, to all the things necessary for good menstrual hygiene will have a significant impact on their freedom.

For Takudzwa, as for many other women and girls in the world affected by disaster, conflict or poverty, not being able to get sanitary products and clean clothing further strips them of any comfort and dignity in their already difficult circumstances.

'We felt excluded before [Tearfund partner] ZOE came in with the support,' she says.

Takudzwa tells how, in her situation, school attendance was interrupted. Before they were able to receive sanitary hygiene kits from ZOE, most of the girls couldn't go to school during their period.

'It feels good to see people expressing their care and love through the support. Human dignity is upheld and you feel motivated,' says Takudzwa.

Absorbing shame

Not being able to afford sanitary products can remove young women from lessons every month, damaging their education, reducing their opportunities, and making it harder to build futures for themselves which will lift them out of poverty or bring them confidence.

Losing confidence, feeling shut out, and not being able to deal hygienically with their monthly periods, no matter where they are in the world, brings to girls a sense of shame around being a woman – especially for those experiencing their first menstruation. This can feed into dangerous vulnerabilities within societies toward sexual and gender-based violence. Through all of these things, it limits the God-given potential these girls have within them to succeed and thrive.

Trapped in a cycle of shame, indignity and poverty – all for want of a sanitary towel.

Strength in small things

Fortunately for Takudzwa, thanks to the generous giving of Tearfund supporters, our local partner organisation was able to provide her, and many other girls and women in her community, with hygiene kits and training in how to maintain good menstrual hygiene.

'I am happy that the lessons we received emphasised the need to stand up for our rights and be bold and courageous to report any abuse being experienced by girls,' enthuses Takudzwa. 'Girls also need to be empowered, so that they are aware of their potential and that they are equally important as boys.'

We couldn't have said it better.

Please pray

Dear God,

Thank you for each girl and woman you have created. We praise you for the wonder and power and potential you placed inside each one. We pray for protection and provision and possibility for each woman and girl around the world. We lift up, particularly, those affected by poverty, conflict and disasters. We pray for hope, and that they will have the futures and the good works that you created for each one of them to do when you designed them in your perfect plan.

God, help us to be champions of women and girls. May we build them up, give them a voice and protect them wherever they are.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Fertile (and infertile) prayers

Peter Shaw, Editor of Tear Times, reflects on how a trip to Peru with Tearfund shaped his prayer life and helped him to be even more thankful to God – even in the difficult times.

For more than three years my wife and I struggled to have a baby. It was one of the most painful and challenging times of our lives, and our faith. We saw doctors, specialists, and received support from friends and church leaders. The official, medical reason was, ‘unexplained infertility’.

According to IVF specialists CREATE Fertility, ‘...unexplained infertility occurs when standard fertility testing such as scans, tubal patency tests and semen analysis have failed to show a cause of the infertility.’

Two incidents stand out from the time of the diagnosis, which was 12 years ago. The first was a consultation with a doctor who looked at the unexplained results, and said, ‘Just relax.’ Stress is often viewed as contributing to infertility, but it’s not very helpful advice during one of the most stressful times in your life...

The other was the pastor at our church. As well as being the church leader he was also a senior medical doctor. He told us that we had to pray, we had to look to God. But he also told us we may have to accept that we may never have children. And that God will be with us in that too.

That was tough. So, we chose to ask God for a ‘miracle’, while accepting that this may not happen. But we knew we needed God with us, no matter what.

Birth of a miracle

In the midst of all this, I went to visit the outskirts of Lima, Peru, with Tearfund in 2010. It was a very poor neighbourhood made up mostly of rural migrants – desperate families coming to the city for work. We were a small team making a film for Tearfund’s Christmas appeal. While we were there, one of our translators was hurt in an accident and needed treatment at the local clinic.

As trip leader, I said I would go with her, alongside a member of staff from the local Tearfund partner we were visiting. I wasn’t allowed to go with the translator and partner to her appointment, and there was no waiting room at the clinic.

The hospital staff asked me to wait on a bench outside. Behind me was a curtained-off row of beds from which I could hear screams and moans. Occasionally, a nurse would rush through the curtains giving me a glimpse inside...

Pulling back the curtain

It was a maternity ward. But remove from your mind the image of a sanitised UK hospital with technical equipment, privacy, plenty of staff and anxious fathers with camera gear ready to record the special moment.

This was bed-to-bed, mothers-to-be lying on top, ripe and ready to give birth. As well as the agonising cries, many of them would roll off or get out of bed – persuaded to go back by the caring (but hugely overworked) medical staff.

And I remember thinking how absurd it was. There was me, desperate for a baby next to perhaps 30 women all about to give birth. And I did pray. One of those rambling, 'I don't know what you are up to God, but I'd like to know...', prayers. (The translator was fine after treatment, by the way.)

Born in Peru

Just over a year later, thanks to IVF, we did have a baby. Our wonderful boy, who is now nine years old. But through the treatment and care that led to his birth, I never stopped being thankful for all the amazing medical facilities and the wonderful staff that we enjoyed.

That encounter in Peru changed my prayers. It opened my eyes to see beyond my troubles and choose, even in the hardest times, to be thankful. But also to ask the question of why I should enjoy such privilege when so many across the world have nothing. Since then, I've visited communities where the clinic, beds and medical staff in Peru would be a luxury.

Encounters like being outside that maternity ward have made me more determined to call for justice and an end to the inequality and outrage of poverty.

Prayer is often like that. It's a tension between feeling worried, determined, scared, outraged, helpless... it's hard sometimes, but it shouldn't stop us praying for breakthrough while accepting that God is in control. And asking him to change us, as well as our situations.

Please pray

Father God,

We cry out to you for mothers and families across the world for whom childbirth is a time of fear. Be with them and take care of mothers and unborn babies.

Please also move in the hearts of people in power to give more support and funding to make childbirth safer. Help Tearfund and our partners reach vulnerable mothers to offer support so that children are born healthy.

We also pray for couples who are living with the grief of not being able to have children. Please be with them, and surround them with people who will journey with them.

Thank you, Father, for the miracle of birth. And for giving your one-and-only son to be born and live amongst us. May we live our lives and seek justice for all those living in poverty, following his lead.

Amen.

Pray for the world

✔ We have recently implemented a new project in Sierra Leone to help end cases of Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting (FGM/C). This will help to empower women in their communities, and sit alongside our other initiatives to reduce this horrific abuse. Thank God for this project and pray for its success. Keep praying for an end to FGM/C.

✔ October is Black History Month in the UK: an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of Black people, many of whom are often overlooked or marginalised. Through our work we see how racism destroys relationships, and broken relationships cause poverty and suffering. Ask God to restore these broken relationships. And pray for God to remove barriers that stop Black people from living the fullness of life as God intended.

✔ Praise God for the way churches around the world continue to support their communities through the pandemic. They're sharing tips on prevention, as well as offering people spiritual and practical help. Thank God for how Tearfund's global network of church partners have equipped them to do this. Pray for wisdom and protection for church leaders, and for an end to coronavirus.