

ONE VOICE

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

A present God and a waiting world

The coronavirus pandemic has forced us to live life in the present. This doesn't mean just waiting for a time when we can do things more freely again. God is still at work in the world, and wanting us to join him. So, what does this look like? We can find some of the answers in the book of Exodus.

After God frees the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, he doesn't just send them immediately to the promised land. Life is not suddenly perfect. The Israelites spend 40 years in the desert, working out how to represent God on earth and live a new way.

There is tension, confusion and even the temptation to go back to Egypt – back into slavery. When reading Exodus, it's easy to be critical of the Israelites. After all, God is at work. He's providing them with food (manna) each day. They've witnessed miracles from God – the literal parting of the sea so they could escape from Pharaoh. God is present in the camps with them through his communion with Moses, and even shares commandments to help them live.

Yet, the Israelites still struggle.

Why this can give us hope for today

God doesn't abandon his people. God doesn't stop doing good works. God doesn't revoke his promises. Even when we lose heart, God is faithful.

Read through that again. And be encouraged that in and through Jesus, God came to us. In and through the Spirit, God is with us today. 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.' (Galatians 5:1)

Next week marks the beginning of Lent – 40 days to intentionally set time aside and draw nearer to God. Why not use it, as the Israelites did, to work out how you can represent God in this time. Because God is at work, healing, reconciling and bringing justice. And even in lockdown, you can be a part of that.

Please pray

A prayer of preparation for Lent:

Lord God,
This Lent
I surrender this time to you:
Open my eyes and my heart and
Remind me of who you are
and who you have created me to be.
Amen.

In the lead up to Easter, draw closer to God through our free Tearfund Lent Devotional: *A story to live by*. We'll be revisiting the story of God and how we can be a part of it. **Sign up to receive daily bite-sized reflections, prayers and poems at www.tearfund.org/OVLent**

A note from...

'With so much going on in the world, let us take time to refocus, reflect and re-wonder ourselves on the story of God and what it means for us today. However you decide to mark the lead up to Easter, our prayer for you is that you're able to draw even closer to God during this time. We wish you and your loved ones a blessed Lent.'

Lucie N'guessan, West Africa Team

The unfolding crisis in Mozambique: how you can pray

Warning: contains mention of sexual and gender-based violence which some readers may find upsetting.

The conflict in northern Mozambique has now been going on for three years. But last year, the situation got even worse. Here's everything you need to know about the crisis and, crucially, how you can be praying.

The first attack happened in the province of Cabo Delgado in 2017 by an armed group that locals call 'Al-shabaab', which has ties to the Islamic State. Since then, the group has carried out more than 600 attacks in this location. They have taken over a strategic port and burned dozens of villages in the oil and ruby-rich district.

The group has become increasingly violent. They are calling for Sharia law across the country, and have created training camps to fight against government forces.

Leaving a trail of human-rights abuses, Al-shabaab are accused of frequent kidnappings, beheadings, human trafficking and violence against children in the towns they are claiming. This has led to more than 2,000 people losing their lives and hundreds of thousands of people forced to flee their homes. Most of these people fled in recent months, as attacks have begun to escalate.

'The situation in Cabo Delgado is very bad right now as increasing numbers of villagers are being forced to leave their homes and abandon their crops and jobs to seek shelter in refugee camps,' says Edgar Jone, who leads Tearfund's work in Mozambique.

What Tearfund is doing

Tearfund has been supporting those who have fled the violence through our work in camps in the south of Cabo Delgado and its neighbouring districts. Through our local partners we have distributed tents, water and sanitation kits, blankets, mosquito nets, torches and sanitary pads.

We are also providing families with food kits, which contain farming tools and seeds. These allow people to grow their own food and not rely solely on aid.

In situations like this, where people have lost a sense of normality, as well as everything they knew, kits like these help restore dignity and give a sense of empowerment and ownership. People are able to grow and support their own families through this.

But the increase in violence means supplies are running low.

'Though we have been able to meet the immediate needs of people who are arriving at the camps, more has to be done to be able to meet the increasing numbers,' shares Edgar.

'The situation is getting desperate as we have new arrivals each day and we have already run out of resources to meet their needs.'

Protecting women and children

Through our response we have been prioritising the most vulnerable – female households, pregnant women, widows, children and the elderly. These groups all face growing threats to their safety, or may find it harder to find help themselves.

In camps and temporary shelters, the risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is high. Tearfund has trained 50 community activists in the camps to help protect women and girls, as well as to offer support and the reporting of cases.

We are also sharing leaflets that carry messages about SGBV, making sure they are available when essential items are distributed. These include how survivors can report incidents and access support.

Pandemic strain

With rising numbers of people forced to flee their homes and live in cramped conditions, it means coronavirus could spread rapidly through the camps. The Nampula province, which is hosting the largest number of people who have been affected by the violence, has been hit hard by the virus.

Cases are rising, but Tearfund and our local partners are doing all we can to prevent it from becoming even more deadly.

We've been training all staff in the camps about coronavirus, as well as providing them with Personal Protective Equipment, so they can safely serve people in need. We've been able to enforce social distancing when items are being distributed. We're sharing information with people within the camps, so they can recognise the symptoms and stay safe, as well providing them with water and soap.

This is also helping to prevent the spread of cholera, a deadly waterborne disease.

World attention

As a result of the deteriorating situation, the Southern African Development Community – an inter-governmental group of countries – is exploring ways it can intervene to help stem the situation.

'Violence is rising, and the amount of people needing urgent assistance is rapidly increasing,' says Edgar. 'Please keep our staff, local partners and the people we serve in your prayers. It is not only a huge comfort to our teams in this difficult time, but we believe they are crucial in helping to turn the tide against this increasing wave of violence.'

Please pray

- Pray for people's safety. Ask God to protect them from further violence, as well as from illness and disease.
- Pray for provision. Ask God for the resources Tearfund and our partners require to help meet the needs of this growing crisis.
- Pray for an end to the violence in Cabo Delgado, and for lasting peace. Ask God to heal religious divisions in the country, as well as other hurts caused by inequality.

Answering God's call to respond to the climate crisis

We're daring to hope that 2021 may prove to be a turning point in tackling the climate crisis. We'd love you, your small group and your church to join us in prayer and action to see breakthrough on this issue. Here's how you can be praying with us this year:

Pray for people living in poverty

The impacts of the climate crisis are accelerating with each passing year. The last five years were the hottest ever recorded. 2020 alone saw a catalogue of record-breaking extreme weather events, from catastrophic storms in Central America to severe floods in Bangladesh and prolonged drought in many parts of Africa.

At Tearfund, we see the tragic consequences of these events for the people and communities we work with every day.

This is an issue of justice: people in the poorest communities of the world did the least to cause climate change, but are by far the worst affected. And it's undoing much of the progress we have made over the past 50 years in tackling poverty.

Without urgent action we could soon see more than 100 million more people struggling to get water, four times as many tropical cyclones and 12 million more people experiencing flooding in coastal areas.

Sadly, for many people around the world, the changing weather patterns and damaged harvests are affecting their everyday life. When you pray for a breakthrough on the climate crisis, and for action to be taken, you're standing with these people.

People like Alaya, her husband Bazwell and their young children who live in Malawi. Alaya's family are reliant on the crops they grow, but changing weather patterns are putting their lives at risk.

Sometimes there's too much rain, which causes deadly floods and destroys crops. At other times the rains don't come and the crops dry up. Harvest after harvest is failing, and for 11 months of the year Alaya's family are hungry.

Tearfund is working alongside people like Alaya and Bazwell and training them in new farming techniques to help them adapt to the changing climate. But, without world leaders taking action to tackle emissions and other causes of climate change, things are only going to get worse for them.

Pray for action to be taken by world leaders

This year the UK government has a crucial role to play as it hosts both the G7 summit in June and UN climate talks in Glasgow in November. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to help set the planet on a better course and create a fairer world for people in poverty.

Encouragingly, we're seeing a growing political commitment to seizing this opportunity. In recent months, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has launched a 'green industrial revolution', as well as announcing that the UK will become the first major economy to end direct public funding for oil and gas projects overseas.

We've seen major progress in other countries too: China has committed to becoming net-zero by 2060 and Japan by 2050, while the US is set to re-enter the Paris Agreement in the next few days. In addition, President Joe Biden has announced plans for the US to end international financing of fossil fuel projects with public money.

But, if we're to see real change for people in poverty, we now need to close the gap between commitment and action – and this will be a key focus of Tearfund's campaigning work this year.

Pray for even more churches to pray and act on this issue

One of the first things that God calls humans to do is to care for creation (Genesis 2:15). As the church, we can love our neighbours and protect creation by raising our voices and our prayers to call for change to help people like Alaya.

Every church that declares or recognises the climate emergency will shine a spotlight on the crisis and send a message to world leaders that they need to take immediate action.

We're seeing a growing number of Christians and churches answering God's call to love their neighbours and care for creation by speaking up, living differently and praying about the climate crisis.

Churches like St George's Leeds, whose Church Council recently voted unanimously to recognise the climate emergency and now regularly highlights the issue in prayers and sermons.

'I've been involved with justice for a number of years but climate change wasn't high up on my agenda,' shares Catherine De Souza, a pastor at City Church Cardiff. 'What kicked me into action was recognising that I have a role, we have a role, the church has a role to play in this and we can do something about it.'

This is a call that each of us needs to answer if we are to see everyone, and all of creation, flourishing as God intends.

Please pray

Spend a few moments praying for each of these three points: for people around the world affected by the climate crisis, for greater action to be taken by world leaders, and for the church to speak up more on this issue.

Pray for the world



At the time of writing, protests in Myanmar against the military coup, which happened on 1 February, have continued to gain momentum with violent retaliations from the army. Banks have stopped operating, which is a huge concern for Tearfund. Pray for people's safety and provision during these challenging times. Ask God for the democratic processes to be upheld and for peace in Myanmar.



Cases of coronavirus in Brazil continue to rise rapidly. There are also concerning reports about high levels of deaths among indigenous communities, who have limited access to clean water and healthcare. Pray for help and supplies to reach those in need. Pray for protection for communities like these around the world who are vulnerable. Keep praying for an end to coronavirus.



The Ugandan government has announced that internet and social-media services will be restored in the country. They were shut down more than a month ago, ahead of the election. The result of this election is being challenged in court. Pray for this challenge to be resolved swiftly and peacefully, so that justice can prevail and tensions across the country will be eased.