

ONE VOICE

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

HOLDING ONTO THE CONSTANTS IN A CRISIS

In these challenging and uncertain times, Tearfund is doing all it can to continue serving people in poverty. This is a reminder of what remains constant amid the coronavirus crisis:

Our **vision** stays the same: to see people freed from poverty, living transformed lives and reaching their God-given potential. We won't stop until poverty stops.

Our **faith** stays the same: faith is what motivates us to tackle poverty and injustice and what drives us on to do better. We pray as we make decisions, and for one another as well as the communities we work with. All our work is rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus.

Our **God** stays the same: it's written in the Bible. 'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God' (Psalm 90:2 ESV). And, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8).

Our **hope** stays the same: 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit' (Romans 15:13).

Please continue to join with us in praying, giving and speaking up for those living in poverty.

PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for people living in poverty, particularly those who are most at risk from coronavirus.
- Thank God that he stays the same and that we can depend on him in these uncertain times.
- Ask God to guide you in how you can use your gifts to respond to the coronavirus crisis to help people in need.

A NOTE FROM...

As a boy, I used to go deep sea fishing with my father. I was never sure how the small boat would fare in the choppy seas and unpredictable swells. The constant was that the harbour was a safe place. If the weather changed, it was important to return to the harbour, the place of refuge. Amidst today's storms, we know the constant is that God is our refuge (Psalm 46).'

Graeme McMeekin, Acting Scotland Director

FINDING HOPE

Warning: mentions of suicide which some readers may find upsetting.

'Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.' (Isaiah 40:30-31)

Particularly in this time of global distress over Coronavirus, it's easy to feel mounting fear and anxiety. Hope can seem a far-off thing. It's human. And it can be overwhelming.

People are not merely physical beings. Our response to pain, suffering and lack in the world isn't enough if we address only material things. We fight poverty because people's lives matter. We fight suicide because it takes a life every 40 seconds.

Death by hopelessness. An inability to see how things might ever get better. A feeling that we've lost control of the circumstances, and there is no way back. The underlying reasons may have different names, but on average it's the cause of 1.4 per cent of deaths in the world each year. And the statistics rise in many of the areas where Tearfund works as conflict, disaster and poverty push people to their limits.

As Christians, we know that there is hope. It doesn't mean we don't grow weary. Or face the same turmoil and mental battles as the rest of the world. It means that when there seems no way forward, only out, we have a hope to cling to that is not dependent on personal circumstances or the news.

When hope is gone

Taara* is 20. Still young. But had she not received counselling through Tearfund's partner where she lives in Afghanistan, she may not have made it this far.

Her childhood was difficult. At home, where she should have been safe, she faced discrimination and abuse – harsh treatment and beatings. By the age of 12, Taara was depressed and shutting herself off from people. Her mother wanted to send her to school, but her father said no. Then, he died. And without a provider in the home, this brought a new set of problems. There wasn't enough money.

So, the family decided to marry young Taara to her cousin. Taara didn't want to be married to him and she knew that he didn't want to marry her either. It seemed a whole life of being trapped and unwanted. She saw only one way of escape.

'I ate poison many times to end my life,' says Taara. 'But I was taken to the clinic and I didn't die... Another time I wanted to throw myself off a tall building to die, but I was prevented.'

'Love always hopes...'

In the midst of her distress, a neighbour came to speak to Taara. This neighbour had attended an awareness session run by a mental health centre who is one of our partners. This was around mental health issues, including living with suicidal thoughts. She suggested that Taara visit them and speak with staff there who might be able to help.

Taara refused. It seemed shameful to admit she might need help for a mental health issue. 'I'm not mad!', she thought.

Fortunately, Taara's neighbour had been well equipped with information from our partner's awareness session. She was able to help Taara to see that anyone can develop a mental health struggle when our environment puts strain on us, just as anyone can develop a physical illness. Taara, her mother and the neighbour went to the centre.

Through counselling sessions and various other practical measures, Taara can see positive changes in her life. She says, 'I feel better now. I feel that I am leaving my past and entering a new phase of life. Now I know that suicide is not the only or best option for the difficulties I face in my life'.

'I want to thank the volunteers [at the centre], the counsellors and the doctors for all their services helping me,' she says. 'For me, the mental health centre in our community is a very useful place that has changed my life. I believe it could change the life of many others.'

There is no shame in needing mental health support. It's got nothing to do with 'mad'. It's got to do with finding the strength to take on what can feel like a very lonely and frightening battle.

No shame

Strong men struggle too.

Azfaar* is 45. Married and a father of four, he used to own his own small business. His wife describes how he used to be such an active and social person.

Then, the small shop which he used to run failed. He couldn't find work and, desperate for a way to provide for his family, moved them to Iran to try there. Working conditions were difficult though, and the family returned to Afghanistan.

Poverty and some other challenging family situations combined began to feel overwhelming for Azfaar. He became depressed and started to avoid others completely.

'Azfaar was afraid of being in the community or at social gatherings,' says his wife. 'He did not like to go to relatives' houses or parties. He didn't like to speak with anyone...'

At that time, Azfaar says he felt that life was meaningless. That he was not useful for his family, or even for himself. He felt as though he always wanted to be alone and face no one.

'Many times, he wanted to kill himself,' says his wife, 'but we prevented him.'

Hope and a future

Mohammad*, a clinical psychologist working at our partner's mental health programme, remembers the first time he met Azfaar. 'He was visibly upset, and his voice, hands and feet were trembling,' says Mohammad. 'He had one of [our] brochures about anxiety in his hand and he told me that he had all the problems written in the brochure.'

Through counselling sessions, Azfaar says that he is now experiencing a new phase of life, without social anxiety. Also, with help from the programme and a loan from some relatives and neighbours, he has been able to restart his small shop.

Azfaar says he is happy because he has new hope for the future. 'I tell everyone who may have a mental health struggle to go to this centre for the mental health services because having a mental health problem is not shameful,' he says. 'I tell them my own experience – that I now see that... mental health problems are curable.'

As we follow Jesus where the need is greatest and share his love, we know that in him there is always hope. Whether it feels or looks like it or not. His love and peace are beyond context or understanding. As with any other illness or injury though, we don't dismiss treatment just because we know that God can heal. Instead, we work, in love, to be his listening ear and supportive arms and to see hope and restoration where there is despair.

PLEASE PRAY

A prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

**Names have been changed to protect identity.*

A LOAF OF BREAD AND A LOO ROLL

March 2020 marks over five years of devastating conflict in Yemen.

While we all face the struggles associated with a world health crisis, 24 million Yemenis already needed aid and protection before coronavirus began to spread globally. That's 80 per cent of the population.

Millions remain on the brink of starvation.

By the end of 2019, this conflict had cost the lives of around 233,000 people. More than half of these were children.

Our partner and many other humanitarian aid agencies, as well as international governments, have been trying to meet the needs of the people in this country. At times they have faced obstruction, delay and restriction by those involved in the conflict.

We are still working. We have not given up. Our partner in the region is making a difference. We are not walking out on the people there.

But a new challenge potentially lurks on the horizon for Yemen...

Coronavirus is yet to be confirmed in the country, however, the likelihood of its spread is high as the number of cases in the region continue to grow.

In a country whose infrastructure has been devastated by five years of conflict, only half of health centres are fully functional.

People have been forced from their homes. Cholera and dengue fever already require lifesaving health responses. Overcrowding makes it difficult to follow basic protection measures like social distancing and hand washing – if the helpful information can be spread fast enough. And if there's enough clean water.

We know you may be worrying about your own family in these times. Your own business. Your own anxieties around the state of the world. The sheer scale of things.

We understand.

As you find ways to meet your household's basic needs amidst the challenges we are all facing, please will you also remember the families in Yemen. Even if they are spared the virus, it relies on imports for 80 to 90 per cent of its basic needs – so the rise of coronavirus around the world will already be impacting the nation.

They are families like ours. Parents who worry about their children's shelter, hunger and education. Sons and daughters concerned about the health of their older parents. People who can feel overwhelmed at the situation in the world around them.

The money it might cost for one extra loaf of bread, a loo roll (if you can find one), and a carton of milk will make a huge difference to a family facing fear, war, hunger and disease. **Will you pray with us, and if you are able to, please consider giving at this difficult time.**

PLEASE PRAY

Heavenly Father,

We lift our eyes to you. Above the troubles. You promise to hear our voice and to act quickly. Father, will you act quickly. Please will you bring healing to Yemen. Bring peace and hope. By your power, will you bring an end to disease, fear, famine and war. Holy God, you are Almighty. Move in power in our world. May we see your hand of restoration.
Amen.

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

✓ There has been one reported case of Coronavirus in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee camp. Please pray for the safety of the Rohingya people living in the camp. Pray that the virus won't spread and for wisdom for the government, UN and our local partners as they support people with access to clean water, safe sanitation and trauma counselling.

✓ Bolivia is delaying its May presidential election due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Please pray for unity for the government and opposition parties as they work together to find a new date. As other countries look to postpone their elections for the same reason, pray that decisions will be made fairly and met with peace, so that people will feel safe in their communities.

✓ Farmers in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia are set to lose even more of their income as locusts continue to devastate crops across East Africa. Please pray for provision for farmers – that they will be able to feed their families and pay school fees. And pray for permanent solutions to this outbreak.