

ONE VOICE

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

When hope hurts: faith and despair in a pandemic

As we draw near to the end of a challenging year, Tearfund's Gideon Heugh reflects on what it means to be a people of hope when hope can seem hard to find.

Life can be crushing. It's important to acknowledge that. Hope is not the same as blind optimism. Hope's eyes are open to the brokenness around us.

It's normal to be experiencing negative thoughts and feelings during times like these. Suppressing these natural responses to difficult circumstances can be damaging. We need to let our grief be grief; our weariness be weariness; our anguish be anguish.

Hope doesn't ignore the darkness; it swallows it up, using it as fuel that we might shine all the brighter. Hope gets its hands dirty. I saw this with my own eyes when visiting Malawi at the beginning of this year.

Reigniting belief

One community we visited was facing months of hunger because the nearby river had burst its banks, ruining their crops.

We were told that the river never used to flood, but now it does so regularly. One of the effects of this is that children can't go to school. They need to work instead, so that they can help their families buy food.

Perhaps the most difficult thing to see was the resignation in people's eyes. But that's where the church comes in. Tearfund's local church partners are working with these communities to reignite their belief that a better future is not only possible, but that our actions can help bring it into being.

This is part of what it means to be the people of God: to not only imagine that things can be better, but to actively create that reality. To be Christ's hands and feet in the world. And to keep believing – even when it hurts.

Please pray

If you feel comfortable doing so, take a few moments to reflect on the challenges you've been faced with this year. Think about the frustrations, the disappointments, the fears. Then invite Christ to infuse those difficult feelings with his presence. Then say, 'I acknowledge these thoughts and feelings. I accept them for what they are. I know that things can change, and I believe in God's power to change them.' Then, do the same for a world crisis that has been concerning you: be that the coronavirus pandemic, the climate emergency or extreme poverty.

This is an extract from a longer article, which you can read in full at www.tearfund.org/OVWhenhopehurts

A note from...

'Hope can be a hard thing to hold onto sometimes. We all will have known great disappointments in our lives, and the weight of the global crises we're facing at the moment can seem overwhelming. But Christ is there in the brokenness. He comes alongside us in our weariness and distress. 'But take heart! I have overcome the world.' (John 16:33)

Vincent Moyo, Country Director for Malawi

The church that changed a village

A small village in Chad struggled for generations without basic necessities such as clean drinking water. But over the past few years, the community has started making fast progress to improve living conditions and escape poverty.

'Makeuré looked like a fire that went out on its own,' says Pafroumi, the chief of the village, reflecting on what life used to be like for his community.

The village was small and isolated, with few social activities or work opportunities. Children had to walk for miles to get to the nearest school and there was no access to clean water. As a result, parents often opted to not send their children to school at all, and many people were getting sick from drinking dirty water.

Bringing the village together

A church had been in the village for several decades but was not involved in the community. When one of Tearfund's local partners started working with the church, they encouraged the leaders to make improvements to the village with the input and cooperation of everyone.

Pafroumi, who is not a Christian, was pleasantly surprised when the church leaders approached him to discuss what could be done to improve the quality of life for the villagers.

Pafroumi and the church held three meetings with the entire village to openly discuss problems and how to solve them. Together, the villagers decided that they wanted to have their own school, health centre, and drinking water.

Fast progress

For the first project, every family contributed money to the costs of drilling a well. They made remarkable progress – within two months, the money was raised and the project completed.

'Today, the whole population drinks drinking water, people wash themselves well and wear clean clothes. Our animals are also watered without difficulty,' says Pafroumi.

The church then set up a school in the village, meaning that children were not forced to walk for long distances to receive an education. Today, the students are performing well, and the school is becoming increasingly popular with the villagers.

The church also offers training on different farming techniques, which has helped people cultivate their land, grow more crops, and support their families.

A united community

These changes have been life-changing for everyone in the village. Pafroumi also noticed a new sense of community spirit and unity, with people from different faiths working and socialising together.

'These dramatic changes led me to inquire of the pastor as to why the church today is interested in us who are not Christians,' says Pafroumi. 'He told me that the church and community project [run by Tearfund's local partner organisation] opened their eyes and taught them to love everyone as Jesus Christ did and changed the way they treated other people in the village.

'Today, I even see members of the community who insulted Christians go to church.'

Big dreams

The villagers regularly meet at the church to discuss problems, find solutions, and dream for the future together. 'A few years ago, this would have been unthinkable,' says Pafroumi.

The community has already started baking bricks to start building their health centre, and aim to complete it in the next three years. They are also planning to build a second well. And this is just the beginning.

'Life has improved a lot in our village,' says Pafroumi. 'I thank God who implanted the church in our village because it helps us today to get out of poverty.'

Please pray

- Praise God for the transformation in the village of Makeuré. Thank God that the church has been part of helping the community come together to lift themselves out of poverty. Pray that this community will continue to thrive.
- Pray for our local partner organisations working with churches around the world to bring community transformation. Pray that they will be able to reach other isolated communities and have a life-changing impact.
- Pray that churches will be inspired to reach out to their communities in new ways.

Black History Month: a Biblical perspective

As we come to the end of Black History Month, we've been reflecting on how the Bible and Black history are connected, and what this means for the church today. A vital part of this is an understanding of 'liberation theology'. Here's a breakdown of what that is and why it matters.

What is liberation theology?

Theology is the study of God's character and action in the world. Liberation theology highlights God's concern for the liberation of people who are marginalised, poor and oppressed. The clear implication of this is that it must also be a central concern of the church. The church must actively and deliberately play its part in the liberation of oppressed peoples.

Are these ideas Biblical?

Absolutely. Liberation theology is deeply rooted in scripture. From the very beginning, God charges his people with creating a culture of justice for the vulnerable. Here are a few key passages from the Old Testament:

'This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.' (Jeremiah 22:3)

'He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.' (Psalm 146:6-8)

'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?' (Isaiah 58:6-7)

In other words, a significant part of our relationship with God is defined by how we treat those who have been let down by society.

What does the New Testament say about this?

Jesus is our liberator. Both in his life and teachings and his death on the cross, Jesus walked the path of liberation. And it's our role as the church to follow in his footsteps.

While the Old Testament passages above focus on liberation at a societal level, in the New Testament we are taught how to apply this on a personal level:

'Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" (Matthew 25:35-40)

When we take action to help other people, it is though we are reaching out to Christ himself. This idea is taken further in the book of James:

'Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.' (James 2:15-27)

The message is clear. Without practical, purposeful action to help people who are suffering – to liberate people who bear the weight of oppression – we are failing as the church.

What does this have to do with Black history?

Black people have been and are being oppressed around the world.

The transatlantic slave trade is an infamous and despicable example of this, but it is far from an isolated case. This oppression can also be subtle: for example, the achievements of Black people have historically not been celebrated as much as those of white people.

The oppression of Black people has its roots in historic colonial abuses, but also in modern systems and structures of power that cultivate injustice. Poverty disproportionately affects Black people globally. The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others over the summer brought into focus the terrible reality of racial injustice today.

If the church is to take up its calling, it must play its part in bringing this to an end.

Why does this matter to Tearfund?

Seeking justice and liberation is central to what we believe and what we do here at Tearfund.

Poverty is a form of oppression. Tearfund exists to empower people to lift themselves out of poverty. Our purpose is to join in with the story of God: which is the story of restoration and liberation.

We all have a role to play in speaking up for and taking action for people who are oppressed. And we won't stop until we see a world in which everyone is free to fulfil their God-given potential.

How can I pray for these issues?

- Pray for oppressed peoples: pray for chains to be broken, for unjust systems to be changed, and for God's liberated light and love to break out into the world.
- Pray for the church: praise God for the positive impact that local churches are making in their communities all around the world. Pray that all churches will embrace the call to participate in God's story of liberation.
- Pray for Black History Month: as the month comes to a close, pray that Black history will be celebrated and honoured not just for this time, but throughout the year, every year.

Pray for the world



Violence in Ivory Coast has increased ahead of the presidential election, due to be held on 31 October. In some areas, homes have been destroyed and cars burnt. About 60 people have been killed. There are concerns that this will turn into wider civil unrest. Pray for people's safety. And pray for cooperation among political leaders so that there can be peace.



Coronavirus restrictions in Rwanda have had a devastating impact on daily wage earners. Many of them have been unable to work, which has pushed them further into poverty. Thank God for a new grant Tearfund has received, which will help increase our support to these communities to help them recover from the losses they've faced.



In the past month, confirmed coronavirus cases have increased tenfold in the camps of northwest Syria. Pray for protection over the people in these camps, who are now facing a harsh winter. They have already suffered so much having been forced from their homes by conflict. Pray for all those who are working to stop the spread of the virus in the camps.