



Lent reflection 3: Live in God, don't labour in vain

A reflection by Alice Keen, Tearfund's International Publications Editor

'Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat — for he grants sleep to those he loves.'

Psalm 127:1-2

Often, when we think of giving things up or changing habits for Lent, we think of things we consider 'bad' – fatty foods, too much time on Facebook and so on. But what about things which are 'good, for example helping at a food bank or running a Bible study group? Should we be scrutinising those things as well?

During Lent, we have a chance to take stock and re-evaluate our priorities. Is the constant stream of things we are doing *for* God getting in the way of hearing his voice and reflecting on his word?

The opening truth of Psalm 127 convicts me and encourages me in equal measure. There are many things in my life that – if I'm honest – I'm building myself. They may be good things (for example friendships, ministries, creative projects), but if God is not leading them, they have no worth. If I build the house, it's actually pointless. That's humbling.

Yet there's also encouragement in the same passage. God can and will build the house, he will watch over the city. He doesn't need me but he will lead me to work with him, to bring his kingdom in the world he loves. So, this Lent I want to give up building my own house, and instead ask God to show me how to build with him and to see my part in his amazing plans. Will you join me?

God, we praise you that you are the one who builds everything of worth and you are the one who watches over us. Thank you that we are never called to build alone. Teach us to be led by you rather than labouring in vain in our own strength. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Staying alive in Iraq

This time last year, the future looked bright for Iraqi student Haydar. He'd graduated first among his classmates with a Human Sciences and History degree, and was about to embark on postgraduate studies. Then conflict broke out in Iraq.

When Islamic State (IS) militants attacked the Sinjar area last summer, Haydar and his family were forced to flee their home. They found refuge in the safer Kurdish region of Iraq, where Tearfund is currently providing essential aid to thousands of displaced people.

Haydar's family had left with next to nothing, and sheltered as best they could during the freezing winter in an unfinished building. Thanks to an emergency cash grant from Tearfund, they've been able to afford medication, blankets and winter clothes to stave off the cold.

Now, spring is around the corner. But life is still very hard for the family as they wait in limbo, living on a knife's edge and longing for home. 'Sinjar is a part of my spirit,' says Haydar. 'Being away from it keeps us alive physically, but that's it.'

However, Haydar still has hope for the future, and the help from Tearfund has shown him that he and his family are not forgotten. 'My hope is to be able to finish my studies and to be a successful person – to have a future,' he says.

- Praise God that Haydar's family have received vital help this winter, and continue to pray earnestly for peace in Iraq so that the future he dreams of can become a reality.
- Tearfund's team in Iraq are currently providing displaced people with latrines, hygiene supplies, shelter kits and emergency cash grants. Pray that these projects will bring relief and encouragement to thousands of Iraqis.
- Give thanks that 19 of the estimated 220 Assyrians abducted by IS in Syria on 23 February have been freed, and pray for the safe release of those still being held captive.

(Names have been changed to protect identities.)

An inspiring woman in the red-light district

This Sunday, 8 March is International Women's Day, a global event that celebrates the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future. In some countries like China, Russia, Vietnam and Bulgaria, International Women's Day is a national holiday. To join in the celebrations, we're highlighting the stories and achievements of five inspirational women who you may not have heard about. One of them is from India.

She was sold into sex work in Mumbai age 13. Staff from the charity Oasis India found Anala, and rescued her from her horrifying existence. The team gave her the love and support she needed to build a new life. Now she has come to faith and received emotional healing, Anala has joined the Oasis India team – a partner of Tearfund.

Now, when she goes back, she shares her experiences of brokenness and abuse to show sex workers that there is a way out. Not only has she helped many women to leave the sex trade, some of the women she has supported have set up their own projects to help sex workers too. Once Anala was held captive, now she is setting other women free with her amazing story.

- Praise God that Anala, through the support of Tearfund's partner Oasis India, found the courage to leave her painful past working in Mumbai's brothels.
- Pray that God will give Anala the strength and courage she needs as she works alongside sex workers – encouraging them through her own story that there is a way out.
- Thank God for inspirational women like Anala in places where women are not valued and treated equally, that their determination will be an encouragement to others.

You can read the stories of all five inspiring women, including Anala, [here](#).

(Names have been changed to protect identities.)