

Sermon notes



This talk is designed to help you build your service. It should take around ten minutes. Feel free to use it as it is, or adapt it and make it your own.

Within the Service Builder we have suggested four Bible readings that you may choose to use during your talk or at a relevant point in your service. The four readings (John 10:10, Psalm 68:32–35, Jeremiah 29:11 and Isaiah 40:31) speak profoundly of God's promises to his people.

As you read the story of Rene and Odile, you will hear how their perspective began to change following Tearfund's Bible-based training. The couple experienced first hand the power of prayer and God's abundant provision.

Today, Rene and Odile are living and breathing the promises God makes to his people in these verses in the Bible.

Irrelevant, dying, obscure. These were just some of the words used to describe Christianity by national media in the last year. But we also heard in a report published in 2022 by the Church of England that the cost of living crisis has led to nearly 3 million people seeking help from churches and faith groups.

In a further campaign, published in 2022 and supported by the Church of Scotland and the Church of Wales calling on the UK Government to increase the cost of living support for the most vulnerable families, specific mention was made that churches are on the frontline of offering essential, lifeline support. From food banks, to homeless shelters and warm spaces – we are seeing that the church has a clear role to play in supporting the community.

[Include examples of how your own church is supporting the wider community]

And this is because churches are often best placed to respond. We understand the needs and strengths of our communities, and we are able to reach some of the most vulnerable groups. Because our churches are here to stay, we can continue to support our communities for years to come. Instead of being irrelevant, dying and obscure, the church in the UK has the potential to bring life in all its fullness to those around us.

It's exactly the same for the communities that Tearfund works with all over the world. The local church is God's plan for community transformation.

‘In the past, we were falling sick, children were falling sick and they were sick all the time. When we cannot sell our products and when people are sick, you are afraid.’

Rene, Ivory Coast



When Jesus called his disciples, he began to train and build up each one of them, helping them to realise their God-given potential. Through those disciples, Jesus established the early church – his ongoing plan for restoring the creation he loves. And that is why Tearfund chooses to work through the local church. Because at the end of the day, it was God’s idea in the first place.

Rene and Odile’s story brings this to life

[Choose whether to show the video or read the story below]

Rene and Odile, from Ivory Coast, worked hard to farm their land and raise their children. But the couple were constantly plagued by fear and worry. They struggled to make a living and could barely afford to put food on the table, let alone pay for school fees or medicine when their children got sick.

‘In the past, we were falling sick, children were falling sick and they were sick all the time,’ explains Rene. ‘When we cannot sell our products and when people are sick, you are afraid.’

Although the family went to church, Jesus’ promise of life ‘to the full’ seemed a long way off. But Tearfund’s Church and Community Transformation training helped the congregation to realise and unlock their God-given potential. Through prayer and Bible study, Rene and Odile’s local church learnt that, with God, the power to change was possible.

In this way, whole churches and communities can find themselves working together to bring about change – helping people to lift themselves out of poverty for good.

Now Rene and Odile are seeing God’s abundant provision. Through Tearfund’s Bible-based teaching, the couple received training on savings and farming. They learnt to diversify their crops – rotating between pineapples and yams – and today they have a thriving pineapple business with a good yield throughout the year.

‘God has blessed us. Today, I can send my children to school,’ says Rene. ‘Today, I am building. Today, I can use money to buy fish, to buy a bag of rice. So I can say that a real change has come.’

Like many others in their village, Rene and Odile harnessed the natural resources around them and released the skills inherent in them. Tearfund’s training works because people like Rene and Odile become self-sufficient, relying only on their unleashed potential and belief that God has created and cares for them. It ends the cycle of dependency so that poverty is overcome for good.

[Once the video has finished]

Tearfund has already equipped 25,000 churches to lift themselves out of poverty and fulfil their God-given potential. And now they have an incredible vision to see 250,000 churches empowered through their Church and Community Transformation training. This will empower millions of people to recognise the skills and resources God has given them, to overcome poverty from within and build greater resilience – with immediate effect.

A recent independent study into the impact of Tearfund's training through local churches found that people living in communities that have been through Church and Community Transformation training are:



113%

more likely to work on shared projects



51%

more likely to have maintained or increased their income in the last year



35%

more likely to be hopeful about the future

The study also found that every **£1** invested by Tearfund in local churches helps the community to unlock a further **£7** in time and resources for shared projects, which ultimately creates **£211** of social value through improved wellbeing.

(Social value measurement aims to put a monetary value to costs and benefits that do not have a market price. These include improved quality of life, increased trust in neighbours or an improved natural environment.)

That's an investment worth giving to.

Tearfund's Bible-based, transformational training is needed now more than ever.

Around the world, conflict is rife, climate change is forcing millions from their homes, and one in ten people are still living in extreme poverty. This is not God's plan.

Our faith is powerful. Our prayers make a difference. But now it is time for us – the global church – to practise what we pray.

And that's where we come in. We can help transform mindsets and break cycles of poverty, because like Odile, who we saw in the video earlier, beautifully explains, poverty is not God's plan.

'Today, I thought I was poor – that this was the curse we had to live with. But I realised in the training that Jesus Christ took away all the curses.'

Odile, Ivory Coast

Odile says: 'I fully believed that I would remain in poverty. This was my thought as my parents were poor. I thought I was poor – that this was the curse we had to live with. But I realised in the training that Jesus Christ took away all the curses. And today, what is in my heart is that I'm going to do the work of God – that I will work hard, and make money and help people, those who are sick, those who don't have a house.'

Tearfund's training really does invoke a complete mindset shift. Odile has received the training and knowledge to change her situation. Once she struggled to feed her own family, and now she is able to reach out and support people around her. Wow, that is empowerment.



📍 Odile stands in the doorway of her home in the village of Loukoukro, Ivory Coast. She is now able to support her family and the wider community.



If we as a church can raise

£297

we could help train three people in business skills to provide for their family's needs. This will unlock their God-given potential and ensure they can provide for their family and the needs of their community for many years to come.

If you would like to give today, donating is easy. You can do this now online at tearfund.org/churchappeal or by giving to the collection at the end of this service.

Thank you so much, it's wonderful to know that our church can make a global difference, empowering local churches around the world to combat extreme poverty.

We're all impacted by the increased costs of living, and I know there will be some of us here today who are struggling to make our wages reach the end of the month. But that is why gathering together as a community is so important. We need to support each other, just like Rene and Odile discovered through their training. They had the tools not only to support their family but to also reach out and support the wider community. So please don't struggle alone, we are a family. If something I've said has impacted you today or you're worried about your financial situation, please come and talk to me after the service.

To finish, I'm going to pray the words of Pastor Amani from Ivory Coast:

'We pray to you, O Lord our God, to enable the church to be a tool, an instrument that you will use to further enlighten others and where God can play his part so that all the glory will be yours.'

'Let this flame, O Lord our God, burn brighter, this desire to love one another, this great desire to glorify your name.'

In Jesus' name, Amen.

☞ Pastor Amani leads the church in Zambokro. He sits outside the house built by his congregation after taking part in Tearfund's Church and Community Transformation training programme.



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