

# One Voice

Your weekly  
prayer resource

The logo for Tearfund, featuring the word "tearfund" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background. The background of the entire header is yellow with a faint world map and a white wavy line.

## The Advent of a global neighbourhood

As Advent begins there are choices to make – especially this year, as restrictions ease and we can celebrate the season in person again with our family, friends and church. How we choose to spend our time, our money, what we pray for and who we invite to join in with the festivities all gives us an opportunity to share Jesus' love with others.

We have a certain amount of control over who we share our homes and our friendship circles with. There are people we love because it's easy – it's comfortable. But Jesus was very clear. We need to love our neighbours too – and not just the ones who bring round cake now and then, or who offered to do our groceries during the pandemic. All of them. Whoever they are. More than that, but we are to love them as we love ourselves.

And by neighbours, Jesus wasn't only referring to the group of people who physically live near us either. Through the story of the Good Samaritan, he explains that our neighbour is... everyone in need (Luke 10:25-37).

Our neighbourhood, then, becomes a global community.

### The ultimate expression of love

God the Son took on flesh and was born into a neighbourhood of humanity. Through his birth on Earth, he placed himself into our physical neighbourhood to demonstrate to us the way we are to love.

He chose us humans. Preferred us over his comfort. Moved into our neighbourhood of flesh with grace and love for us to receive and to emulate. Jesus' birth began his journey to the ultimate expression of love for us – his death and resurrection.

As we approach Christmas, let us pray that we, as the church and as humanity, will be reminded and inspired, more than ever, to live out the radical message of Christmas. That we will see and celebrate and lift each other up – preferring one another to ourselves.

## Pray with us

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your son, Jesus. Help us to love our neighbours well. May we live in a world of restored relationships, where all people are able to fulfil the potential you have placed inside them. And let this season of Advent be a time where we can draw even closer to you.

Amen.

If you're looking for more ways to reflect on how you can love your neighbours – near and far – during the Advent season, **sign up at [www.tearfund.org/OVAdvent](http://www.tearfund.org/OVAdvent) to receive daily devotional emails from Tearfund** in the lead up to Christmas.

## A note from...

'Sometimes I find it hard to keep in my heart people who seem so far away from my daily life. But Advent is a time where I am reminded that, after loving God above all things, Jesus taught us that our main purpose on Earth is to love our neighbour. When I consciously make the decision to include people who I'll never meet in my prayers, I somehow feel they become a little closer to my heart – because in the end we are all God's children.'

**Caroline Trutmann, Latin America and Caribbean Team**

## Pray for the world



Last weekend's government election in Venezuela was the first in nearly four years not boycotted by the main opposition parties. However, there are reports the process was not fair. As living conditions worsen in Venezuela, more people are fleeing to Colombia. Tearfund is working with churches there to help those who have fled. Pray for those elected in Venezuela to lead fairly and justly; and for living conditions to improve.



In South Sudan, Tearfund has just hosted a church and community transformation training session with 300 church leaders. They were equipped in how they can bring their communities together to overcome poverty. Thank God for this opportunity and ask God to bless these church leaders as they take the teaching back to their communities.



Tensions are high in Uganda after a recent increase in violence there. Pray for peace in the country, and pray for wisdom for its leaders as they seek to resolve the situation and restore calm. Lift up our staff and partners in Uganda as they continue to serve people living in poverty.

# How Jesus is transforming masculinity

*Warning: contains mentions of sexual and gender-based violence that some readers may find upsetting.*

**Prabu Deepan, who leads Tearfund's work in Asia, explores how Jesus Christ is the best model to transform masculinity, and how we must all be on a journey to challenge and change our behaviour to become more Christ-like, treating each other equally.**

My father was very violent towards my mother. But he was a really good cook. He always cooked and took care of us. But that didn't change how he saw my mother as a person, as a woman. He saw her as property: someone he could act violently towards without repercussions – even his church did not challenge his behaviour.

My journey exploring masculinity started when I decided that I didn't want to be a man or a husband like my father. Or a father like him. But that was just the start. It's the same as believing you are a good person because you haven't killed anyone. You look at the worst and, because you are not like them, you believe you must be a good person in comparison.

## Jesus is the man

Instead, we need to look into scripture – at Jesus Christ – and ask what model of behaviour did he display? We need to aspire to that, rather than looking at the worst in society and being satisfied we are better. We need to look at Jesus and decide that we want to be like him. And work towards that ideal.

I have never been physically violent towards women. But I am quite passive-aggressive and I behaved that way in my relationships. But my benchmark was people who use physical violence, comparing myself to my father and other men. I thought my passive-aggressive behaviour was okay because I was better than others.

Back then, I hadn't done anything to unlearn, unpack and critically examine my own life. Now I understand that violence is more than physical, it is emotional, economical and sexual.

## Promoting equality

I came to understand that behaviours that constrict and limit women's autonomy in relationships – emotional and psychological threats and manipulation – are toxic. I realised there was more to change in my life before I started to work with others. It should be a journey we are taking together. I don't come to other people saying that I've got it all figured out. We need to critically reflect together and hold each other accountable, working towards the aspiration of being like Jesus Christ.

Based on this principle, I helped to develop *Transforming Masculinities*, a Tearfund programme that encourages positive, healthy behaviour in men and promotes gender equality to more effectively address sexual and gender-based violence. It focuses on individual behaviour change around gender, masculinity and faith. Aiming to engage men and boys, the programmes' activities are a mix of biblical reflections and best practice from other approaches.

## Imagining an alternative to toxic masculinity

I started my formative research to develop *Transforming Masculinities* in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. When I talked with one church pastor in Burundi about how men should behave differently, he asked me, 'How can I be something I have never seen?' He had never experienced any alternative. That's why we use examples in *Transforming Masculinities* from the life of Jesus. We examine and unpack the way that he behaves in the Bible and ask what it means for us to be more like Jesus.

If you've been called to lead a church, how does that mean you should behave? The programme has an activity where we imagine an alternative community where there is no violence. We ask how men would behave there, what women would do there and how relationships would be improved. And, as a result, how not just women's lives would change, but all of society: men, women and children.

It's important to imagine this alternative, because reality is so different. Unless you can see it, you can't know, understand or fathom what that would be like.

## Transforming relationships, reducing violence

So, we help people to understand that everyone is equal and that God created them. And ask what difference that makes in all our relationships: marriages, communities and in the church. Are we constantly upholding those values? It's about total transformation. Not just whether men should be cooking, like my father, or helping with the cleaning. We should be valuing and treating each other as created by God and equal in all things. That is the essence of *Transforming Masculinities*.

When we work with communities, we are helping them move towards a society that looks like the kingdom of God. Somewhere that values and has equal space for both men and women, boys and girls to thrive. And, so far, we haven't met with much resistance. In fact, we've seen significant reductions in violence.

We are currently running the programme in 12 countries. In one project in the DRC, we recorded a reduction of more than 60 per cent in intimate partner violence recorded from the start to the end of the project. And an 80 per cent reduction in non-partner sexual violence in just two years.

We've also recorded an increase in social cohesion: people generally getting along better. That demonstrates that when you change the way you feel about yourself, it changes the way you treat others.

## Unlearning a lifetime

There are so many examples of how *Transforming Masculinities* has changed individuals. One church pastor in Central Asia said, 'I curse the day I met you, Prabu. Before I came to this meeting, everything was okay for me. Now it doesn't feel okay. I'm conflicted. If I hadn't met you, I would have carried on with my life as normal. Now, I want to unlearn what I have learned.'

That is the journey we want to take people on: back to Jesus and his gospel of restoration.

## Pray with us

Lord Jesus,

Help us not to compare ourselves with others, but to look to you as an example of how we should care for and value everyone equally. Help us all to be on a journey where you can reveal to us the areas in our lives that we need to change. We pray for transformation in communities where men do not treat women as equal and valued, and for healing for the women who suffer as a result. May your example of compassion and humility bring true transformation.

Amen.

# Millions now homeless as Ethiopia's Tigray crisis escalates

*Warning: this article contains mentions of violence that some readers may find upsetting.*

**For months now, conflict has been building in Ethiopia. It is now at breaking point. Across the north of the country, in Tigray, Amhara and Afar, violence between government forces and armed groups has forced millions of people to flee for their lives. Many are facing severe hunger. Here are some of their stories.**

## When violence arrived at their door

Habiba\* and her husband, Ahmed\*, lived a peaceful life with their twelve children – they had everything they needed. But as the conflict started, food became scarce, as seeds for crops were in short supply. Harvests were abandoned by farmers, escaping the violence. And many were too scared to travel and work.

Ahmed was elected by his community to help distribute aid to those in the area who needed it. But then armed groups showed up in his village.

'My husband was a farmer, he was not involved in politics. However, homes were searched... and killings began,' Habiba shares with us.

'My husband... he hid under the bed [when they] lined up at the door... They abducted him.'

## Escape

After her husband was taken, Habiba fled with her children to another district.

'I came here because my life was difficult and I was afraid of being attacked. Now I don't know where my husband is,' she says.

On arrival it was difficult for Habiba to support her children – they had nothing. Different host families in the community took in the children so they would have shelter and food. But thanks to

support from Tearfund's local partner, Friendship Support Association (FSA), they have now been reunited.

'You give me not only food but also my children. I sent my children to different families... to save their lives. But now, thanks to the FSA, I can feed my children and start living under one roof with my children,' says Habiba.

Tearfund is working with FSA to provide families like Habiba's with food, shelter and access to clean water and safe sanitation. But the need is increasing: more than 3 million people in Ethiopia have now fled their homes due to the violence.

### **Torn apart**

Fathers like Hakim\* have spent months escaping with their families from Tigray – many travelling on foot with their young children.

Hakim and his wife, Aisha\*, fled with their three young children – aged four, two and one. Aisha was also heavily pregnant.

During one harrowing part of their journey, Hakim and the two eldest children became separated from Aisha and their one-year-old. This is not unusual when families flee – it is hard to stay together in the chaos.

Hakim left the children in the care of a family while he went in search of his wife and baby. He waited at the bus stop for the next bus to come in – wondering if they were on it. But then armed groups evacuated those who arrived on the bus and killed them. Only one old man and the driver survived.

Aisha wasn't there. He stayed looking for her for the entire day.

On his way back to his children that night, he found his wife and baby. Thankfully, the whole family was reunited. They then continued their journey together.

### **Survival**

'On our journey, we were begging for food and water and the trip took 45 days to arrive here in Koneba,' shares Hakim. 'My wife gave birth as she arrived here.'

Hakim is now suffering from health problems due to the long and stressful journey. The lack of access to clean water and safe sanitation has also taken a toll. This means he can no longer work, and cannot provide for his family.

Aisha's mother lives in Kenoba and tries to support the family but it is difficult. Violence across the country means that food supplies are extremely low. There are hundreds of thousands of people facing starvation.

FSA were able to provide Hakim with food and support to help the family begin to recover from their ordeal.

'Banking, marketing, electricity, and even continuous water supply is disrupted. Tearfund's and FSA's support has significant meaning in our life,' says Hakim.

'Although my health is not fully restored and I'm unable to support my family. Thanks to FSA... we manage to fulfil our immediate needs using the items provided to us.'

### The need is great

'Tearfund and our local partners will continue to do all we can to support those who are fleeing the violence,' shares Ephraim Tsegay, who leads Tearfund's work in Ethiopia.

'These people have lost everything and many are now facing severe hunger.'

The Ethiopian government has declared a 'state of emergency', urging its citizens to arm themselves and fight.

'Please keep the people of Ethiopia in your prayers,' says Ephraim. 'The need is increasing and resources are depleting. And keep praying for peace.'

### Pray with us

Invite God into this space – this could be as simple as saying 'God, be with me now as I lift up Ethiopia to you.'

Read through the stories of the families above again and take notice of the journeys they have been forced to take due to the violence. Of the things they no longer have. Reflect on how they might be feeling.

Talk to God about what stands out for you and pray for these families – and the millions of people in Ethiopia – who have fled. Pray for the needs you've read about in their story. Ask God to bless them and to bring peace and healing.

Don't rush away – listen to God – he may speak to you through scripture or an image, or put something on your heart to continue to pray for about the crisis.

End by committing everything to God and thanking him for working in and through you.

*\*Names changed to protect identities*

**tearfund.org**

100 Church Road, Teddington TW11 8QE

T 020 3906 3906 E [info@tearfund.org](mailto:info@tearfund.org)

Registered office as above. Registered in England: 994339. A company limited by guarantee.  
Registered Charity No. 265464 (England & Wales) Registered Charity No. SC037624 (Scotland)

The logo for Tearfund, featuring the word "tearfund" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background.