

# ONE VOICE

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

## **LIFTING THE SPIRITS**

*In the run up to International Youth Day on August 12, meet the school student in Afghanistan who courageously challenged cultural prejudices to save a woman's life.*

**Jamila always knew that her neighbour Bahiri\* had a hard life. Forced to marry a much older man when very young, she then developed epilepsy during her first pregnancy. Her husband took a new wife, thinking the epilepsy was a 'djinn' – an evil spirit.**

Jamila was deeply concerned by these traumatic events: 'My neighbour found it difficult to cope with the stress and tried to commit suicide, but fortunately didn't succeed.' No one was helping Bahiri, so, despite being only 16 years old and still in school, Jamila decided to take action.

### **Courage**

In Afghanistan, stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems is rife. Those suffering with mental health issues are excluded from their families and the wider community; often shamed, insulted or beaten. These social problems often make it harder for people to find the help that they need.

Tearfund's partner have been working in west Afghanistan to change attitudes and behaviours surrounding mental health. After receiving the training, Jamila knew she had to do something to help Bahiri. Jamila realised that she did not have an evil spirit, but a medical condition that could be treated. It took a lot of courage, but she persuaded her dad to go with her to see Bahiri's family.

Jamila spent a long time trying to convince them that Bahiri needed to go to a medical clinic. Eventually they agreed. The doctor told the family that the problem was totally treatable.

### **Inspiring change**

As a result of the care she received, Bahiri is much better. Jamila is thrilled at the difference that she made to this vulnerable woman's life: 'I am so happy that my father and I could help and pass on what I learned in the training.'

Changing attitudes and behaviours takes time and commitment. It depends on the bravery of ordinary people to speak out to challenge the outdated ideas and practices in families and communities. Jamila is just one example of many young people in Afghanistan who are starting to become more socially active and inspire change in their communities.

Jamila's courage, intelligence and care for one woman's life made all the difference. She spoke out when she needed to, changing a whole family's attitude – ultimately saving Bahiri's life.

*\*Names have been changed to protect identity*

PLEASE PRAY:

- Thank God for Jamila's courage and tenacity. Pray for God's blessing over her life as she completes her studies.
- Pray that Bahiri will continue to recover – both physically and emotionally.
- Lift up the work of our partners in Afghanistan as they seek to change attitudes and behaviours.

A version of this story originally appeared on We Are Tearfund – our platform for youth and young adults. Visit [www.wearetearfund.org](http://www.wearetearfund.org)

#### **A NOTE FROM...**

'What an inspiring story of courage from Jamila. This reminds us of the incredible impact that young people can have in their communities and the important role that Jesus has given them in seeing the end to extreme poverty. Please keep praying for young people around the world and in the UK.' **Abigail Reilly, Youth Team**

## **FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY COUNTRIES: NEPAL**

*To mark 50 years of Tearfund, we're sharing about 50 countries where we've worked, celebrating God's provision and power to transform, and praying for each of these nations. This week we're in Nepal.*

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in Asia. With a lack of essential electricity and water, high levels of unemployment and widespread corruption, a quarter of the population live in extreme poverty – surviving on the equivalent of less than £1.45 a day.

Tearfund has been working in Nepal since 1970. Our partners work in vulnerable communities constructing homes, building water systems, teaching valuable and practical life skills and protecting marginalised people such as women and people from lower castes.

In 2015, two major earthquakes hit Nepal, killing nearly 8,000 people. The survivors were left vulnerable to natural disasters, at higher risk of diseases and facing the challenge of losing their homes and other essential infrastructure.

#### **Building hope and homes**

After the 2015 earthquake, Tearfund was among the first organisations to start building permanent, earthquake resilient homes. Success stories are flooding in from Nepal as Tearfund's partners continue to build community infrastructure, rehabilitate water systems, and protect vulnerable adults and children.

In the remote hill village of Basanta, Thuli Maya Syangtan was one of the first people to benefit from a new home...

As an elderly widow, whose six children had died, Thuli relied on her sister for survival, 'If you don't have family or children, people are not kind, they show me no love, and it makes me cry. If my sister was not there, I would die hungry.'

When the earthquake hit, Thuli was on her land tending to her crops. 'When the earthquake struck I felt dizzy, everything was shaking and I put my hands on the ground to support myself. I came home after the shaking stopped and I saw that everything had collapsed.'

### **Building community and friendships**

Villagers helped her to construct a temporary shelter while Tearfund's partner Rural Awareness and Development Organisation (RADO) built a stronger permanent home for her. For Thuli, a home isn't just a protective structure, or somewhere safe to keep your belongings, it is a place where you can build and grow relationships.

'I was really happy when I found out that I would get a house. People started visiting me. I like people coming, I am always happy, never angry when I have visitors.'

Tearfund's longer-term development plans in Nepal continue to focus on development as we work with churches and other community based organisations to build relationships as well as homes and infrastructure.

### **PLEASE PRAY:**

- Praise God for his provision for our partner RADO to build permanent, earthquake resilient homes for communities in Nepal.
- Pray for Thuli to have many opportunities to share her joy of a new home with lots of visitors and build meaningful lasting relationships.
- Pray for Nepal to be protected through any future natural disasters with strong infrastructure and effective disaster preparedness and response.

## **A REFRESHING CHANGE**

**What kind of decisions in your everyday life are influenced by your faith? As Tearfund's Richard Lister has discovered, your beliefs can even influence how you quench your thirst...**

My co-worker, Dr Ruth Valerio, is drinking an avocado and mango juice. It's a beautiful swirl of green and yellow and she gulps it joyously. Usually at this time of day on a tiring overseas trip I am ready to down a Coca Cola. However, today I think twice about my choice of refreshment.

Ruth's drink has been made simply from local fruit. My Coke would require ingredients from other countries as well as a substantial amount of water for processing; a 500ml bottle requires a whopping 150 litres of water – it's 150 litres that won't get used somewhere else. I have changed what I choose to drink (and much else besides) because somebody I respect has set an example for me.

What we do depends strongly on what we believe to be important. And, as Christians, what we believe to be important is linked to how we understand our faith.

### **One gospel, two understandings**

Yesterday I chatted with two church leaders in Hawassa, situated in Ethiopia's beautiful Great Rift Valley. We sat in a crowded sitting room and talked about caring for God's creation. Elder Tesfaye\* was explaining how his church had planted some trees on the church compound. However, like so many in the room that day, he struggled to make the connection between this action and his Christian faith.

Pastor Birhanu, who was sitting next to me, joined our conversation. He was able to see and explain the connection. 'We are created to keep the environment well, he told us. 'Creation care is part of our calling as Christians. One part of the creation cannot live without other parts; when we destroy the forest we cannot get the rain'.

Motivated by his understanding of the gospel and God's creation, Pastor Birhanu says he plans to travel back to his home, 200km from Hawassa. There he will teach his church about the importance of caring for creation – in particular he is going to persuade them that the village needs to stop destroying their local forest.

Pastor Birhanu also will try to persuade the local government to take action to control the deforestation. I think that he is taking much greater action than Elder Tesfaye because he creation care lies at core the core of his Christian beliefs now.




### **Which gospel, which gospel?**

Let's scale this up this comparison. There are currently 70 million professing Christians in Ethiopia – that's 65 per cent of the total population. Whether their understanding of creation care is closer to Pastor Birhanu or Elder Tesfaye will substantially determine whether the nation is cared for or destroyed. This is vital not only for the sake of the environment, but also for Ethiopia's poor, who are the most likely to suffer and die because of environmental problems such as drought, flooding and landslides.

Thinking even more widely, there are about 2.4 billion people who classify themselves as Christians on the earth – that's 33 per cent of the population. In the same way, what things they believe lie at the heart of their vision of the Gospel, will majorly determine what kind of future there is for all of us. And again, all over the world it will be the poor who stand to lose most if the environment is despoiled.

Is caring for the environment a central part of what it means to believe, or an optional extra just for those who are interested? Ruth, who inspired me with her lifestyle choices, has written a book – Just Living – on the subject of creation care. Do take a look – care for God's creation really isn't optional.

## PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

-  Last week the Indonesian island of Lombok was devastated by two earthquakes. More than 150 people were killed, and thousands of homes and businesses were destroyed. Pray for comfort for all those who are mourning, healing for those who have been injured, and wisdom and provision for the local authorities as they respond.
-  Please pray for the success of a week-long cholera vaccination campaign in Yemen. The disease killed over 2,000 people during an outbreak last year. Pray that people will be able to receive the healthcare they need, as half of all Yemen's medical infrastructure is not fully functional due to the war. *(Please do not share this online).*
-  Please pray for the people of Mali as they near the second round of presidential elections, following an inconclusive result. Please pray for a smooth and peaceful process despite the recent increase in violence in the country.