

RESTORING LIVES BROKEN BY WAR

The war in Syria has been going on for eight years. It can seem distant and remote – until you spend time with people whose lives have been torn apart. It's these people who benefit from your prayers and support. People like Areej...

Areej is an incredibly strong woman. But she and her three children have been through terrible things.

'Before the war I lived a safe and happy life,' Areej tells us. 'We lived in satisfaction, we weren't rich and we weren't poor but had everything we needed.'

Then the war came, bringing bombs, death and kidnappings. 'We were trapped,' she says. 'We couldn't go to the shops to buy the things we needed.'

Survival

They lived like this for two months before they could leave. 'It was very dangerous. We were afraid wouldn't make it to Lebanon, but would be killed by snipers on the journey,' Areej recalls.

They made it to Lebanon, and have been living in a tent, in a camp, for the last seven years. She is grateful to be alive, but refugee life is hard. Not only were she and her children left traumatised by their experiences, they struggled to adapt to life in a tent, with no way of earning a living to pay for essentials like food.

To get them through the darkest days, Tearfund's partners provided Areej with emergency aid packages. But this was just the start.

Helping the whole person

Tearfund and our partners are helping people holistically – emotionally as well as physically. Along with emergency supplies, people are benefiting from workshops helping them to cope with their pain.

This is especially important for children. The war has been going on for eight years, meaning some have grown up knowing nothing but violence and upheaval. Through these workshops

they are being supported to recognise and manage emotions like anger, and work through the trauma they've experienced.

Areej tells of the restoring power of the sessions. 'It has brought me inner peace; I have joy in my heart and it has changed me on the inside. My hope for the future is that my children will continue their education and be able to choose a good profession. I want them to learn and have a bright future.'

Your prayers are helping to make that bright future possible. Thank you.

Please join us in saying this prayer for refugees around the world:

God of rescue,

We thank you for your love – a love that knows no walls.

We cry out on behalf of refugees around the world: protect them as they travel; keep them safe from danger and ill-treatment; comfort and heal them in their distress.

May they find safe places to stay, with all the provision of food, water, shelter and clothing they need.

Move the hearts of political leaders around the world; give them a sense of compassion and justice; and help us all to create a world in which no one has to be a refugee.

Amen.

If you'd like to do more to help people like Areej, you and your church can get involved with Tearfund's Big Quiz Night – a poverty-fighting, fundraising extravaganza on November 17. Visit www.tearfund.org/quiz for more info.

A NOTE FROM...

'Hearing the human stories at the heart of the Syrian conflict can be devastating, but it also gives me hope. Areej and others like her are showing incredible bravery and tenacity in the face of dreadful circumstances. Your support is vital as we work to give families like hers the dignity they deserve.' **Louise Dean, Middle East Team**

FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY COUNTRIES: MEKONG

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 Mekong.

The Mekong River flows nearly 3,000 miles from the Tibetan Plateau into southern China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. The naturally rich and fertile lands around the river basin make up a region known as Greater Mekong. Nearly half of the world's rice is grown here.

Following decades of armed conflicts, relative peace in recent years has led to a strengthening economy. Governments in the region have cooperated more, helping to build infrastructure such as roads.

Despite this, poverty and inequality remain widespread. Shifting demands on shared resources like rivers and forests are altering delicate ecological balances, often with a negative effect marginalised communities.

‘I do it out of love’

Tearfund’s work in Mekong is focused on the area where the borders of China, Myanmar, Thailand and Laos meet. Our local partners are working hard to transform the lives of vulnerable migrants – giving them control over their own development in a sustainable way.

An important aspect of this includes working through local churches to protect the rights of migrant workers, including their citizenship rights when they enter a country. Church communities provide safe temporary homes for people fleeing economic hardship or persecution.

Khin Kihn*, a lady from Myanmar, has received 100 people into her home over the last few years. Neighbours and the church family have been supporting her by providing meals. The migrant visitors have also been given paid work on the local farms. When we asked about her motive in doing this, she replied, ‘I do it out of love.’

Envisioning the church

We’re also helping communities to prepare for natural disasters, such as cyclones and floods, and working with children at risk, especially girls who are vulnerable to human trafficking.

Tearfund aims to envision 100 churches in Mekong to meet the needs of these migrant communities. We have been working to reduce HIV/AIDS prevalence through programmes to educate churches and vulnerable groups, and are developing a number of local language resources to do this work.

PLEASE PRAY:

- Pray for an end to corruption and injustice in this area, so that those currently living in poverty will begin to benefit from the region’s wealth.
- Pray for the churches Tearfund is working with to stop child trafficking and reduce the risk of migrants contracting HIV/AIDS.
- Thank God for the generosity and open-heartedness of people like Khin Kihn, and pray that God will keep these fires of love burning.

**Name has been changed to protect identity*

FAITH, HOPE AND CLARITY

When Jack Wakefield came to faith in his teens, his Christian parents were delighted. But then, a couple of years later, Jack had a second ‘road to Damascus’ moment. This one caught his parents, and everyone else, off-guard. It was a moment of clarity that turned his whole life on its head, as he explains.

When I was 13, I made a Christian commitment. I was at a Bible camp in Devon and I’d just listened to a speaker talk about Jesus’s care for us. Afterwards, I sat outside under the starry sky, which was crystal clear out there in the countryside. I was overwhelmed that the God who had made the night sky that I could see in front of me, could be interested in stooping down to help us in our plight.

As I understood it then, I was becoming a Christian to get to heaven – it was an entirely ‘spiritual’ transaction and it didn’t seem to have any bearing on the outside world. I knew there was more than this. As a young child I had performed in a school play about the Amazon rainforest and its deforestation. From an early age I knew these were important issues, but I couldn’t quite see how God fitted into all this.

Missionary zeal

I couldn’t go back to normal after that experience, and so my adventures began. I spoke at school assemblies and church about Fairtrade, and I put little signs all over my parents’ house, from the thermostat to the tumble dryer, reminding them to use less energy!

My parents were very understanding about all this – I think they thought it was a bit weird at times though. But at the same time, I think they were excited to see my faith coming to life so powerfully.

Once, I returned from university and declared that we would become a ‘zero waste family.’ I told mum and dad I would do all the shopping and cooking and show them how it was done – they liked that!

I planned and prepared all the meals, with the minimum packaging I could. We put all the waste into a small jar. At the end of the week my parents looked at the tiny bundle of rubbish we had collected. They compared it with last week’s fat bin bag of discarded packaging and admitted, ‘you’re right, this really is making a difference!’ Now they’re actually better at the whole zero waste thing than I am!

At one point, I stayed with a family on a gap year. They knew I was a big fan of coffee but they saw that I wasn’t drinking any of theirs. When they asked, I explained to them that I was drinking their tea because that was fairly traded. They were lovely about it, and they ended up buying me a special jar of Fairtrade coffee, which sat next to theirs in the cupboard. From then on, every time they bought something fairly traded they would proudly show it off to me!

Gospel clarity

It all fell into place a couple of years later. I still remember sitting on a patch of purple carpet in a converted cattle shed at my first Christian summer festival. A speaker from Tearfund began explaining how God’s church isn’t simply a waiting room for eternity, but a team we are invited to be part of, a community with a mission.

It totally changed my understanding and really excited me. It was something I could really give my life to. I started learning about inequality and poverty. I learned about my life as a 15-year-old in the UK and how different it was to the life of a 15-year-old in Ethiopia.

Seeking justice suddenly went from being a nice add-on to my faith, to something right at the heart of it.

The long haul

I've left university now, and work for Tearfund full time. It's been a real challenge to carry this commitment to live differently into my new, much busier, life. One of the things I'm trying to do is to cut down my meat and dairy, especially for environmental reasons, though I can't think God sees thousands of battery hens crammed into a tiny space and thinks that's good either!


At Tearfund, I've been helping to launch a brand new project called Restoration Story. It's about those very things that brought me to life aged 13 and 15. It's about God's story; how the maker of the night skies, bends down to heal and restore his creation. And how he asks us to join him in doing this precious, sacred, work one small step at a time.


Restoration Story is about God's story, but it's also about our stories of change and transformation. Stories are powerful things, and we can use them for good.


So what's your story? I'd love to hear it.

Join the conversation today: www.tearfund.org/jointhestory

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

 The run up to the Pakistan elections has seen political rallies targeted by suicide bombers three times in the last week. Around 200 people have been killed, and more than 200 injured. Please pray that the days ahead of the elections on 25 July will be free from violence. And please lift up all those who have been injured or have lost loved ones.

 It's been three months since demonstrations against the government began in Nicaragua. The violence has left an estimated 280 people dead and many more injured. Pray for the people in Nicaragua living in fear, and pray especially for families who have lost loved ones. Pray for peace and justice to return to Nicaragua.

 Please pray for Mozambique, where the leaders of the main parties have made a peace agreement to end the ongoing conflict. Pray that this will lead to lasting peace and economic stability. And please pray for God to bless our partners there, who are empowering and equipping local churches to transform the lives of people living in poverty.