

ONE VOICE

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

Keeping a rhythm of prayer when times are tough

Tearfund's Rachael Adams speaks with our staff team from around the world about how to keep a rhythm of prayer when times are tough.

Praying can often feel difficult when we're experiencing exhaustion, anger or despair. Many of us will have only seen an increase in these emotions over this last year due to the coronavirus pandemic, on top of life's other challenges.

No matter what was going on in the world, Jesus would slip away and pray (Luke 5:16). Even when he was scared (Mark 14:32), Jesus prioritised time with the Father. It sustained him. And we can get the same peace, strength, purpose and joy from following his example and keeping a rhythm of prayer – even when times are difficult.

Here are some ways you can draw close to God when it hurts:

'Take it one day at a time,' shares Caroline, Tearfund's communications officer for Latin America and the Caribbean. 'I remember how God has always been there for me in the past and this strengthens my faith that everything will be alright. I may not understand why things are the way they are but it's enough to know that if I hold on to my faith the storm will pass. I also try to focus on all the blessings I still have.'

Lucie N'guessan, Tearfund's communications officer for West Africa, adds: 'When I can't pray because of the pain I sing but my soul is praying through the songs I sing.'

'When I face challenges or become overwhelmed with concerns, being surrounded by God's creation helps me refocus and ground myself. There's a sort of healing I find when I sit in our garden and keep still, looking at God's creation,' says Patricia, Tearfund's communications officer for Asia.

'I try every week to help someone, sometimes it doesn't have to be something big, sometimes it's just about being present for another person. This reminds me that this is God's purpose for our lives – to help and love each other,' says Caroline.

Please pray

Choose one of the above pieces of advice – whether that's worshipping or spending time in God's creation – and meet with God.

Find out more about how to form a rhythm of prayer by reading the longer version of this article at [**www.tearfund.org/OVprayerrhythms**](http://www.tearfund.org/OVprayerrhythms)

A note from...

'No matter what happens God is faithful and he remains the same. Keep your eyes fixed on God and remember that we are living in a world with high uncertainty. You may be feeling shaken, but remember that you are valuable, you are created in God's image and he has marked us with his seal (Ephesians 1:13) and that's what matters. This fact cannot be changed!'

Muna Abu Ghazaleh, Eurasia and North Africa Team

Escaping the debt cycle in Cambodia

The devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Cambodia's economy, coupled with an ongoing debt crisis, is pushing millions deeper into poverty.

Officially, Cambodia has reported zero deaths from coronavirus to date. However, its main industries – tourism, construction and clothing – have suffered massive losses due to the effects of the pandemic.

It's estimated that nearly 2 million people have already lost their jobs. The World Bank has warned that the poverty rate in Cambodia – already one of the poorest countries in the world – could double as a result.

A growing problem

Cambodians often travel to find work in neighbouring countries where they can earn more money, but with the current coronavirus restrictions this is also no longer an option.

And there's another problem. The vast majority of Cambodians have taken out a loan at some point, and their debt is growing day by day.

Many loans come with extremely high interest rates, and paying them back is a struggle at the best of times. But now, with most or all of people's income suddenly lost, repaying the debt has become impossible.

'With the coronavirus restrictions, as well as the flooding that happened a few months ago, people who can normally go out of the country for work, or those who have worked in the labour industry, are not able to work and are not able to pay off their debt,' explains Ponloeu Ea, Tearfund's National Learning Coordinator in Cambodia.

Many Cambodians have been forced to sell their land or take out more loans to cover their debts, and some have even fled the country in desperation.

Breaking the cycle

Tearfund's local partners are aware that this debt-cycle is a widespread problem in Cambodia. Even before the pandemic, their 'Umoja' initiative helped set up support groups through local churches to empower people to take control of their finances and avoid debt.

The groups also pool their savings to start small initiatives that will generate income and benefit the whole community.

'Our church partners are best placed to help the local communities learn more sustainable ways of managing their finances,' says Ponloea. 'Umoja helps people get on track with their finances and teaches them to save.'

Nakry* is one of hundreds who have benefited from the Umoja project. A few years ago, she was struggling to provide for her two sons after her husband left her. She worked hard with a small grocery business, but she couldn't earn enough money to support her family.

When her church started an Umoja group to help members of the community save and manage their finances, Nakry signed up. Not only did this help Nakry become financially stable, she grew in confidence as she was part of a group that encouraged and supported her.

'The other members in the group gave value to me in group discussions,' says Nakry. 'This is really different from the past... my husband never gave value to me.'

Inspiring others

Nakry now wants to share with others the difference the group has made to her life, and encourage them to save.

'Nowadays, I am very happy about what God gave to my family... and that I also have salvation from him as well,' says Nakry. 'I am continuing to save with the group members, and I also have plans to share about the advantages of saving to the community in order to help them understand and join the saving and credit project.'

As the impact of the pandemic continues to cripple Cambodia's economy, these support groups are more vital than ever. Ponloeu hopes that others will see the success of people like Nakry and be inspired to join a local Umoja group to receive support with their finances: 'When people see the long-term positive impact of saving or starting small-scale and sustainable businesses, this opens up more possibilities and helps individuals escape the cycle of debt.'

Please pray

- Thank God for Nakry, and that she was able to find a supportive group during her time of need. Pray that she will continue to thrive and be able to help others become financially stable.
- Pray for the millions of people trapped in debt in Cambodia. Ask that they will receive wisdom, support and provision to escape this cycle and live full lives.
- Pray for strength and wisdom for our local partners as they face challenging situations and increasing needs in their communities.

**Name changed to protect identity.*

Thousands flee their homes after a disputed Presidential election in CAR

Armed groups in the Central African Republic (CAR) are threatening more violence after a disputed Presidential election last month.

President Faustin-Archange Touadera received more than 50 per cent of the votes cast. But a coalition of armed groups, backed by former president Francois Bozize, is challenging the result.

Thousands of people have been killed and more than a million forced to flee their homes since Bozize was ousted in 2013. A peace agreement was signed in 2019, but many regions have remained in the hands of armed groups.

Amid violent scenes in parts of the country, presidential and legislative elections were held on 27 December. And tensions have continued into January with thousands more fleeing their homes,

fearing attacks. However, government and UN peacekeeping forces have recently reclaimed the towns of Bouar and Boali from the armed groups.

The final election result will be confirmed on 19 January.

Dangerous work

Tearfund works alongside partner organisations in CAR, training people in literacy and business skills, and helping church leaders to lead on preventing sexual and gender-based violence within communities. Much of this work was made possible thanks to the generosity of Tearfund supporters and the UK government's UK Aid Match scheme. We are also responding to the coronavirus pandemic, along with other humanitarian agencies.

But in a nation as unstable as CAR, there are severe challenges. The country is one of the most dangerous places in the world for humanitarian agencies such as Tearfund to work. According to the UN, there was a 39 per cent increase in attacks on humanitarian workers from 2019 to 2020.

'I still hope that peace is achievable,' says Christine Karumba, who leads our work in CAR. 'For many vulnerable women and their families, peace would mean being able to provide for their children, having access to their land, clean water, economic opportunities and basic services such as healthcare and education.'

'That's why the church is at the heart of Tearfund's work. It brings communities on a journey of reconciliation, tolerance, and lasting peace, promoting the development and stability of the country.'

Please pray

- Pray for a sustainable solution to this crisis and for peace to replace conflict.
- Ask God to protect people who have fled their homes since the 27 December election. Some lost their lives as they tried to cross the Ubangi River to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Ask God to comfort their families as they grieve.
- Pray for the Lord to continue to protect Tearfund staff and partners in CAR, and enable them to reach those most in need at this time.

Pray for the world



The UN and charities have finally regained access to some of the refugee camps in Tigray, Ethiopia after conflict in the region. Many people in these camps have been exposed to violence, without food or support. Pray for more access to be granted so that help can reach those in need. Ask for God's protection for people in the camps. And pray for peace in Ethiopia.



More countries around the world are going into lockdown measures to try and limit the spread of coronavirus. These include Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Lebanon. Lift up the work our local church partners are doing to help communities cope with the lockdown, including delivering food parcels to those in need. Pray for people's mental and physical health in these challenging times.



Due to the climate crisis, Bolivia's Tuni glacier is disappearing faster than predicted. It's disappearance is now imminent. This is likely to make the water shortages in the capital city, La Paz, even worse. Pray for wisdom for Bolivia's leaders as they navigate this crisis. And pray for provision for those struggling to find clean water.