



16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence

A Tearfund resource for prayer, reflection and action

Semerera: stand with us

Trigger warning: *some of these reflections reference sexual and gender-based violence that some readers may find upsetting.*

All of the names in these stories have been changed to protect identities and any images used are not of the people involved.

One in three women around the world will face some intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life. This type of violence exists in times of peace, but when there are humanitarian crises, gender-based violence (GBV) becomes exacerbated.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence is a global campaign that runs from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to 10 December (International Human Rights Day) to highlight the problem and show how we can all play a part in bringing about hope, change, restoration and justice.

Where there is silence around the subject, it remains hidden and it makes it more difficult for those most vulnerable to find help, protection and a way out.

Please pray and stand with us.



Day One:

Helping people to help people

25 November

When communities are equipped and encouraged to speak up and respond, there can be help for those affected by gender-based violence.

Chirashree lives in Nepal. She has two small children – a son and a daughter. The area where they live is exceptionally beautiful, but their community faces major issues around poverty, alcohol addiction and domestic violence.

Tearfund's partner organisation, Compassionate Hands For Nepal, has been working within the community to increase public awareness of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), especially domestic violence. They support the community to respond to violence in ways which increase the safety of the survivor and enable the survivor to make their own choices about the future.

For Chirashree, this meant that when her alcohol-addicted husband beat her severely and broke her daughter's hand and her son's leg, members of the community got medical help for them immediately and informed the local Women

Empowerment Network for more support. Chirashree's husband was arrested by the police and put in prison – removing the threat to her.

Tearfund also works closely with partners to help strengthen the links between health and care providers and local communities to ensure that survivors of SGBV are able to access help as soon as they need it.



Please pray

- Pray for communities where people are learning about gender-based violence and taking steps to support survivors.
- Pray for comfort and emotional and physical healing for survivors who have experienced domestic violence.
- Pray for effective responses where there are multiple risk factors involved, such as alcohol and drug abuse.

📍 A woman by a school in a village in Nepal, where Tearfund and its partners are working.
Photos: Chris Hoskins/Tearfund



Day Two:

Deborah: woman, judge, leader, poet

26 November

Adapted from a devotion by Jo Knight, Former Advocacy Director at Tearfund Australia.

■ *'Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him.'*
(Judges 4:14)

The time of the judges was a violent, destructive and faithless period for Israel where 'everyone did what was right in their own eyes'. Deborah is the only female judge mentioned in the Bible, and one of five female Old Testament prophets. She was renowned for her wisdom and character and people came to her to settle all sorts of disputes. In God's strength, she exercised wise leadership, and God used Deborah's leadership and faith to bring the Israelites back to him.

Deborah was an impressive mix of judge, prophet, poet, singer and songwriter. She was a courageous military leader, and also creative.

Thank God for the biblical example to us of women like Deborah who remind us to respect and celebrate the influence, strength, wisdom and skill women can carry.



Please pray

- Pray for women to be recognised for their leadership and wisdom and to be included in decision-making processes.
- Pray for women to gain positions of influence to bring about God's kingdom, and to support other women to achieve their God-given potential.
- Pray for good, strong female role models to stand up and to inspire young girls, that they too can have influence at the highest levels of decision-making.

📍 Alaya (23), wearing a grey top, walks with her daughter Emily (1) strapped to her back through flooded farm fields. Her village has been badly affected by hunger, flooding, deforestation.
Photos: Alex Baker/Tearfund



Day Three:

Justice and equality

27 November

Sexual and gender-based violence is not purely a women's issue; it's a justice issue about the equality of individuals.

It's not common to see a Congolese man carrying a baby on his back. Mr Lodzavi is 49 and a father. He explains, 'In our culture, women and men's roles are segregated, especially when it comes to childrearing.' It would have been considered disgraceful to be seen doing what was considered a woman's role – something perceived as less important than a man's.

But since Mr Lodzavi took part in training run by one of Tearfund partners, CECA20, around Transforming Masculinities (TM), things have changed.

The TM process works through workshops or structured small-group discussions to focus on the cultural and theological beliefs that promote harmful gender norms. Using scriptural reflections, the TM workshops help men to understand how SGBV affects their community, and to address unequal power and privilege between genders.

Now Mr Lodzavi says, 'I realised how we, men, have been making life miserable for our wives. From now on, I have decided to assist my wife regardless of what others may think of me in my community.'



Please pray

- Pray for the men and women who have chosen to participate in the Transforming Masculinities programme, that their families and communities will become free from gender-based violence.
- Pray for opportunities for the Transforming Masculinities project to reach more communities.
- Pray for more men in leadership positions to actively and publicly champion women's rights and protection.



Day Four:

Rescue by radio

28 November

When people are aware of a problem, and when those facing it start to find out that they are not alone, it brings strength and courage to take action.

In Nepal, Tearfund partner, Compassionate Hands for Nepal, has been using radio to break the silence and combat the stigma surrounding SGBV and the survivors of it.

Through messages that raise public awareness of SGBV issues, people have been encouraged to stand against SGBV and to advocate both for themselves and on behalf of others. Survivors, who used to hide their pain for fear of the stigma, have found strength to start to raise their voices against the problem, to be able to talk about their journey of healing, and to support others to heal from their experiences.

Roshni Lama says, *'The idea of radio broadcasts is wonderful to make people aware of SGBV and advocate for themselves*

to raise their voice and stand against it. I appreciate CHFN/ Tearfund for this creative work to reach the people during this lockdown – [particularly for] those who are suppressed and unknown to the reporting system.'



Please pray

- Pray for those who are hearing messages about gender equality on radio shows – that they will be encouraged and inspired to take action.
- Pray for opportunities to reach more people with messages of gender equality, especially where rates of violence are high.
- Pray that messages about SGBV will not only be heard, but will inspire action and change to protect those most at risk.

Power from the margins – A Bible study

29 November

Today's study is written for us by David Couzens, Tearfund's Global Peace building lead.

■ *'When David was told what Aiah's daughter Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had done, he went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead... and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up.'*
(2 Samuel 21:11-13)

The story of Rizpah is told in 2 Samuel 21:1-14.

Until a few years ago, I had never heard of Rizpah – or perhaps it's more accurate to say that I had never noticed her. Rizpah appears in only a few verses in the Bible and her story is not well known. Her impact, however, is considerable, bringing both dignity and truth into a murky deal made by those in power to try, quietly, to put to rest a great injustice.

Rizpah was a concubine of King Saul who, after Saul's death, became caught up in the tussle for power – a pawn in the games of powerful men, before she and her two children were cast aside. She had little influence or power.

I have learnt to respect this determined woman for her courage and her persistence, for her ability to ignore the jibes and criticisms of others and to hold firm to what she knows to be right.

Saul had, during his reign, tried to kill off the Gibeonites – a case of attempted genocide – and we are told that the blood of the Gibeonites was crying out to God for justice. Drought and famine hit the land in the early years of David's reign. David 'inquired of the Lord' for the reason and was told it was on account of Saul's massacre of the Gibeonites. Eager to end the famine, David went to the Gibeonites to find out how to make amends. The Gibeonites, however, thirsty for revenge, demanded the execution of Saul's remaining male descendents. The deal was done and the seven remaining male descendents, including Rizpah's two children, were dragged away and summarily executed. Their bodies were strung up in public and left to decay. We are even told that this was done 'before the Lord', conferring a sort of false religious authority or legitimacy on the ugly deed.

Merab, the mother of the other five that had been killed, disappears from the story. Rizpah, however, refuses to be quiet. She sets up camp on the hill by the bodies of her children and drives away the birds and the wild animals from them. She refuses to allow this terrible act to remain in the darkness. Her actions bring it into the light.

We are told that she was there from the beginning of the harvest until the rains, a period thought to be about five months. She would, no doubt, have suffered verbal and probably physical abuse, been mocked and humiliated, ridiculed. But she kept firm, holding the crime up into the light.

Eventually, King David is shamed into coming to meet this woman who refuses to be quiet, or to fit into the place prescribed for her, or to behave. Instead of the mad woman that had no doubt been described to him, he meets a woman with a quiet dignity – a power within that makes him recognise and confront his own failings and recalibrate his actions.

King David collects the bones of those killed and of Saul and Jonathan and finally buries them with dignity and respect. The deeds of darkness are acknowledged and brought into the light, their stories are told, their lives recognised.

All of this because of one woman refusing to go quietly, refusing to turn a blind eye to the deeds of darkness, and demanding truth and acknowledgement.

Throughout history, there have been many other 'daughters of Rizpah', women who have refused to allow deeds of darkness to remain there. If you would like to know more, I strongly recommend the book *Daughters of Rizpah* by Sharon and Dan Buttry who first introduced me to this powerful story which has now become a key part of Tearfund's peacebuilding training.



Please pray

- Pray that all of us would have our eyes opened to those we haven't noticed before, seeing them as God does.
- Pray that the voices and perspectives of women are respected at every table – in the UK and in every country around the world.
- Pray that people in positions of power will hear the voices of those who are speaking out for justice.



Day Six:

Martha's strength

30 November

‘I am left alone in this painful journey. My eldest son has become more stubborn, he demands to see his father. It's very difficult to make him understand that his father is no more... My heart aches to see my youngest son, who does not know what it means to have a father. He has only seen his father in photographs.’

Martha's youngest son was born a month after her husband's death. In her community in Pakistan, where gender norms can place heavy responsibility on women (particularly on single mothers) while at the same time severely limiting their options for earning an income, his birth added to her burdens.

Martha lives with her seven children, including her eldest son who has special needs. She was devastated when her husband Akhter died in April 2020 from heart disease. He was the family's only provider and, without him, Martha was not sure how she and her children were going to survive. 'Akhter's death was paralysing,' she says. 'When my husband passed away, I felt unworthy. The worst days of my life started after his death but I had no time to grieve because my life was turned upside down.'

Often, all Martha had to feed her children was a few potatoes. The continuous worry took a toll on her health too.

Many women in Martha's position, facing stigma and desperation, find themselves pressured to participate in the sex industry because of the lack of an alternative viable, safe option for well-paid work.

With support from a Tearfund partner organisation, Martha has been able to start a small shop based in her home. The shop will soon provide an income to support Martha and her family, and has helped her to realise that she is much stronger than she thought.

Helping women like Martha, in communities where there is huge gender inequality, to build a livelihood that gives them income and self-respect helps to protect them from being vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence.



Please pray

- Pray for all the women who are supporting their families alone, that they will have strength and wisdom.
- Pray for all those who are running small businesses to generate a sustainable income. Pray that their businesses will be successful and that they will be able to support themselves, their families and their communities.
- Pray for an end to harmful stigmas that are embedded in many societies and cultures, which create vulnerability to SGBV.



Day Seven:

The unnamed heroine

1 December

Adapted from a devotion by Ruth Valerio, Tearfund's Global Advocacy and Influencing Director.

■ *'Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."' (2 Kings 5:2-3)*

This is one of my favourite stories in the Bible. On the surface it reads quite prosaically: a young serving girl sees that her mistress' husband is suffering from a serious skin disease. The girl is from Israel, so she knows about Elisha and how God can heal through him. If Naaman could just meet Elisha, she thinks, he could be healed. And, of course, that is what happens, despite Naaman's arrogant attitude towards the Jordan River!

But let's think more about some of the dynamics going on here...

The Israelite servant girl has been kidnapped by a band of raiders from Aram. In today's language, she has been trafficked, sold into slavery and bought by Naaman for his wife. It doesn't take much to imagine what treatment she may have received at the hands of the band of raiders, or even at the hands of Naaman. This isn't a girl who has applied for a housekeeping job in someone's house. This is a girl who has most likely suffered severe violence and is living in domestic slavery a long way from home.

Her story challenges and motivates me. Through the servant girl's openness, God is able to work a wonderful miracle. This leads Naaman to acknowledge that the God of Israel is the only God of the world. Despite the awfulness of her situation, God is able to use her powerfully.



Please pray

- Pray for women who are trapped in difficult situations that they didn't choose – that they will know that they have power to make a difference in spite of their circumstances.
- Pray that they will rely on God, and that they will find strength to fight for justice in their situations and contexts, and that others will step up to fight for them too.
- Pray that those causing harm to women and girls will be moved to change their actions.



Day Eight:

Sex-ploitation and trauma support

2 December

Angela came to one of the support groups totally devastated emotionally and spiritually by her situation. Now, she says she feels very strengthened and sure that her daughter is in God's care.

Angela came to Colombia with two of her daughters and a grandson. They had fled the difficult economic situation in Venezuela, but because of their immigration status, Angela wasn't able to get employment and was forced to work at traffic lights selling cleaning supplies to earn money for food for the family.

One day, while they were at one of those traffic lights, one of Angela's daughters was approached and offered a very well-paid job in Chile. Full of hope, Angela's daughter went. However, the job offer was not what it seemed and she became a victim of sexual exploitation.

The last Angela heard was that her daughter had managed to escape and was trying to get back to Colombia via Peru.

With such desperate financial circumstances and with difficulties around visas and work permissions, many vulnerable migrant women find themselves in similar situations. Often they are trapped and unable to escape.

Even if/when they do, the trauma of what they have been through can be devastating.

Our local partner, Cristo Para la Ciudad, works with people like Angela in the Venezuelan migrant community – providing trauma healing groups with church leaders in the service of the community.



Please pray

- Pray for vulnerable women who have been forced to flee their homes because of economic circumstances or conflict and are migrating within countries and across borders.
- Pray that God will give clear discernment to women who are offered opportunities. Pray that they will be protected to make the right decisions about who it is safe to trust.
- Pray for justice – that those who are exploiting migrant women will be held to account.



Day Nine:

Healing the wounds

3 December

Roxana was a sex worker. She is one of 86 women who meet every Monday in her local church to receive support through a trauma healing group. Here, the women can heal those deep wounds that were destroying their lives.

It's a common story in Colombia. Venezuelan women who have migrated to escape the economic crisis over the border find themselves without options for earning an income and are forced to participate in the sex industry. They have little control over their bodies, they are treated without dignity or respect, and the accompanying shame and trauma can be overwhelming.

Tearfund's local partner works with people like Roxana who have migrated and ended up involved in the sex industry. They support them to heal from their trauma, and to find safe work and housing so that they can become part of a community.

Roxana has made her escape from that world of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, and now she shares her testimony on the streets with other sex workers,

inviting them to find the same help and support to heal their hearts and restore their lives through the church support groups.



Please pray

- Pray for the safety of women who have been forced to participate in the sex industry. Pray that they will find ways out of the industry and gain safe employment.
- Pray for an end to stigma of women who participate in the sex industry. Pray that they will be seen and known as God's children, whom he loves.
- Pray for restored dignity and self-worth for women who have been caught in the sex industry – that they will know their great value.

📷 Two Venezuelan women pray together at the support group for Venezuelan migrants at a makeshift church in Barranquilla, Colombia.
Photo: Peter Caton/Tearfund

tearfund



Day Ten:

Stand up, speak out and fight SGBV

4 December

When communities work together to stand up and to speak out against SGBV, lives are changed.

In Burundi, 15 of Tearfund's local church partners have established a peer-support network for survivors of SGBV. It's called *Semerera*, which means 'speak out'. The network has adopted a motto: '*Haguruka, semerera, iyamirize!*' It means, in Kirundi, 'Stand up, speak out and fight SGBV!'

So far, 679 survivors are regularly participating in these support groups led by survivor champions who have completed the *Journey to Healing* process and demonstrated an ability to lead others well.

These leaders have gone from experiences of facing abuse, to being in a position of influence and they are now being invited by the local authorities to speak out in their communities. Together, they have managed to reach over 4,900 people with messaging about SGBV awareness and prevention.

Through the project, local partners have recently also been able to ensure seven serious SGBV cases (six women and one man) were referred for medical attention and given support to access legal justice.

The project is also addressing harmful social norms and promoting gender equality, with 90 leaders so far having completed the *Transforming Masculinities* training. Together, through sermons and community dialogues, they have reached 34,112 people.

In addition, 113 women leaders from 28 churches participated in dialogue sessions about SGBV issues within the family as did Mothers Union members from the Anglican Church in Matana diocese.

Ending SGBV is a whole-community, whole-society effort, where every person has a role to play in standing up and speaking out.

Semerera!



Please pray

- Pray for continued boldness for women and men who are going against the grain in their culture and speaking out against ways of thinking that have become normal and acceptable – but which promote inequality and make life unsafe for many.
- Pray for courage for survivors as they take the brave steps of speaking out – that they will continue to experience healing and that they will be heard and treated with dignity and respect.
- Pray for leaders to champion those who are most vulnerable and for justice systems to enforce laws that protect survivors of SGBV.

📍 Two women gather in a church in Gitega province, Burundi. Churches are often the location of Transforming Masculinities groups.
Tom Price/Tearfund



Day Eleven:

Masculinities, Faith and Peace in Nigeria

5 December

Gender-based violence can take many forms, and the social pressure to have multiple children too quickly is one of them. Globally, around 295,000 women die each year due to maternal-health complications, often caused by falling pregnant too close to giving birth previously.

In Nigeria, Tearfund has been working with communities to enable women and couples to time their pregnancies healthily, and to make informed decisions about when to try for a child. This project, called *Masculinities, faith and peace*, has been incredibly successful with communities in Northeastern Nigeria, and rates of other types of gender violence are also falling.

The project has also worked to reduce inter-religious conflict by encouraging dialogue between Christians and Muslims, who now come together to address the issues in their communities. As a result of the project, women are increasingly involved in these discussions, and men and women, Christians and Muslims, are able to jointly make decisions that benefit everybody.

One participant, Rahila, described the impact in this way: *'In the past, husbands didn't listen to their wives if they suggested going for family planning [advice]. Now, the husbands encourage their wives and sometimes remind them to take their family planning contraceptive or visit the clinic so that they can space their births.'*



Please pray

- Pray that more women will be able to have greater control over their pregnancies, especially the timing and spacing of them to ensure their continued health.
- Pray for peacebuilding initiatives in communities like those in Northeastern Nigeria – that they will be effective and that life will become safer for everybody.
- Pray that, as more women are included in discussions, that they will be heard and changes will be made which protect young women from coercion around things like childbearing.

📍 A typical church in Jos, Plateau, Nigeria.
Photo: Ruth Towell/Tearfund

tearfund

All the Abigails

6 December

Today's reflection is adapted from a devotion written by Veena O'Sullivan, Tearfund's International Director.

■ *'David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.'*
(1 Samuel 25:32)

The story of Abigail in 1 Samuel tells of a woman who was so full of faith and courage that she rode through the desert on a donkey, laden with food, to meet her husband's enemy. She was so close to God that fear was not her portion. She spoke with humility and confidence, showing the depths of her wisdom. She acted in the moment, knowing what was in the future. She used her gifts with love, wisely, and for the sake of her people and her household. That kind of love is God's love.

Even as I write these words about Abigail, wife of Nabal and David, my mind is flooding with images of many faces – women like Abigail, from across the many nations I have traversed over the years. In the midst of war and chaos, division and despair, these women – these Abigails – have done what they knew was best for their families and their people, almost always at a painful cost.

A gorgeous Abigail in war-torn Burundi went out to find food so that her husband and children could eat that day. That night, she was beaten. Another night, she was thrown out of her home by her drunken husband, her Nabal. She slept in the bush and woke up early to do whatever she could to get food for herself. At least her children already had their food – as did her husband who lay in a drunken stupor. In the heat of the midday sun she went out again, trying again to pick some firewood to sell, giving some to the woman next to her as well.

Another young, beautiful Abigail in South Africa went back to college to complete her education. The rape of her body, mind and spirit in the corridors of her college stalled her for a while, but she came back determined for the sake of her two sons. She looked her rapist in the eye and told herself that he had no power over her. She launched a movement of survivors of rape and together they began to speak justice and power at home, in places of worship, and to seats of power. For the sake of other girls, Abigail spoke up. She knew her God was with her.

A petite, gentle Abigail grew up in the dangerous forests of Myanmar, where groups have fought each other and the government for years. She did not know much about the

world beyond her village. She knew God and that he was with her. She knew that the children in her village needed her and the other mothers to look after them. She knew that the women who were from the side of the enemy also cared about the things that she did. So, she reached out, sharing food and laughter in the other women's homes so that they could live in peace even as their men fought. The church leaders saw and gave her room within their worship walls so that this quiet leader could lead them and their people in ways of courage, love and generosity, breaking away from the fear of oppression of armed groups.

I am compelled! How could I not be?

I wonder if Abigail felt any anger, even for a second? I will never know. But what I do know, what I am drawn to seeing in Abigail in the Bible – and the many Abigails across the world – is that I have the power, ability and gifting to intercede and become a safe space, so that my people can count on me to act with love, wisdom and generosity even in the face of adversity. As a woman, as a child of God, and as one who has much but also sees and feels much, I am drawn to intercede for others. God is mighty and willing to do far more than I can imagine. So I stand up again.



Please pray

- Pray for women all around the world to be powerful in their peacemaking. Pray that they will be powerful decision-makers who bring peace to conflict.
- Pray for courage for women who stand up against violence and injustice. Pray for their protection in the face of danger and persecution.
- Pray for strength and provision for women who face difficult circumstances – that they will have hope and the ability to carry on standing up for what is right.



Day Thirteen:

Aarya's betrayal

7 December

Aarya, in India, is only 17. She struggled with anxiety and used to run away a lot. Not knowing where else to get help, she trusted people who she thought were her friends – but they betrayed her.

For young women and girls like Aarya, not having a safe place to find counselling or support when life feels overwhelming, can leave them vulnerable to exploitation – including being trafficked. That's what happened to Aarya.

By the time Aarya was found, rescued and taken into government protection, she was pregnant and so distressed that she was trying to find ways to make herself miscarry.

Around this time, her father also, sadly, died – and because of lockdown restrictions, Aarya didn't get to see him. She was devastated.

When Aarya was able to start to receive counselling through Tearfund's local partner, she spoke of terrible nightmares, gripping fear and bouts of extreme anger. She also shared memories from when she was younger and used to have episodes that looked like seizures, which had been dealt with in a way that was publicly shaming for her and left her traumatised.

Aarya wanted to continue with her education and build a future full of possibilities for herself, but she was struggling. With support, she has been able to start to find ways to cope with her stress and sadness, and she was able to carry her child safely to term.



Please pray

- Pray for mothers and expectant mothers, that they will have the support they need to raise their children. Pray particularly for mothers or those expecting who did not fall pregnant by choice or out of a consenting situation.
- Pray for absent fathers – that they will share the burden of raising children and running their homes.
- Pray for Tearfund and its partner organisations as they support women to heal from trauma so that they can start to have the courage to take new, positive steps in their lives.

Power and influence

8 December

Today's reflection is adapted from a devotion by Corie Colliton, Former Digital Communications Manager at Tearfund USA.

I 'The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.' (Exodus 1:15-17)

'The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.' (Exodus 1:15-17)

In the first chapter of Exodus, we are introduced to a pair of midwives named Shiphrah and Puah. Although scholars aren't totally sure whether these women were Egyptian or Hebrew, we do know that these midwives had a lot of work to do! At the start of their story, the Israelites were living in Egyptian captivity, and they were having a lot of babies. As the Pharaoh exploited their labour and denied their God-given dignity, the Israelites were well on their way to outnumbering their enslavers. But Pharaoh knew he could not let this happen.

Determined to keep a grip on his power and wealth, he devised an evil plan. He believed that by getting rid of all newborn boys, he could keep the captive Israelites from rising up against him, and he believed that Shiphrah and Puah would help him.

But this plan failed for two reasons.

Firstly, the women he tasked to carry out his evil bidding, Shiphrah and Puah, weren't ultimately accountable to the laws of earthly kings – but to the laws of God. Secondly, he sorely underestimated the power and influence Shiphrah and Puah had, especially among other midwives.

Some scholars believe that Shiphrah and Puah were actually the head midwives among all the others in the land. If this was the case, Pharaoh would have expected them to pass on the orders he gave to all of the midwives beneath them. In other words, Shiphrah and Puah may have held a position of power and influence. Depending on how they responded to the Pharaoh's commands, they had a lot to gain or lose.

If they obeyed, they may have been rewarded and honored. If they disobeyed, they risked their position, privilege, and even their lives. It's important to recognise that Shiphrah's and Puah's ultimate decision to disobey Pharaoh wasn't just because they didn't like his plans or his politics. They resisted out of respect toward God and his laws. This was probably an attitude that had been cultivated over time.

Each day, as they supported labouring mothers, encouraging them to keep going and bringing them through the danger of childbirth, they had been practising for the moment they would be called before Pharaoh. Would they turn their back on their people when things got tough? Or would they continue to protect the Israelites in their most vulnerable moments? In the end, their civil disobedience led to the protection of God's people, and eventually, their deliverance into the Promised Land.

When the time came and the pressure was on, these women knew without a doubt that their loyalty lay with the King of Heaven. Despite the risks, their minds were fixed on God's justice. Thankfully, we don't have to summon the courage to do this on our own. God promises us his Spirit to strengthen and encourage us to do what must be done for the sake of his kingdom.



Please pray

- Pray for all women who bravely resist corruption and violence on behalf of themselves or other women in their contexts.
- Pray for men and women everywhere to have deep convictions about justice, and to carry out actions which honour God and others.
- Pray for all of us to be reminded that we have the Holy Spirit who strengthens us so that we can stand up and act for what is right.



Day Fifteen:

Speaking out for girls' futures

9 December

In August 2020, over 3,000 girls were subjected to the practice of Female Genital Mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) in Sarh and Koumra, Southern Chad.

In circumstances where there was already risk of SGBV, the coronavirus pandemic has made existing challenges even worse. Globally, there has been a rise in the number of cases of gender-based violence since the start of the pandemic and the accompanying lockdowns.

One particular issue, which can affect communities like these two in Chad, is female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C). FGM/C is illegal in many places around the world as it is recognised as causing severe short- and long-term physical and psychological damage to the survivor. Sadly, it is still a deeply ingrained practice in some communities and thousands of young girls continue to be subjected to the trauma and pain of FGM/C.

Tearfund has responded in Sarh and Koumra by setting up an emergency project to support these communities in facing this challenge. The project brought together church leaders and local government officials with a group of dynamic FGM/C survivors to raise awareness about the negative impact of the practice on girls, and to expose how FGM/C not only changed their lives forever in terms of the trauma they faced, but also hindered their access to education.

FGM/C is often a prerequisite to child marriage and many girls were subjected to the practice as parents were looking for marriage opportunities for them. A group of five

survivors, who have gone through Tearfund's *Journey to Healing* process, were able to provide basic counselling to some young girls who had been subjected to FGM/C.

One survivor shared her motivation for raising awareness about FGM/C saying, 'I was cut when I was the same age as these young girls. I was immediately married and stopped going to school. I really want to tell parents to think about their daughters' futures and not subject them to this because it changes their lives forever.'

Our partner organisation, SERBAD (Service Baptiste pour le Développement), was also able to host weekly radio talk shows for a month, raising awareness on consequences of FGM/C and calling on parents and traditional leaders to abandon the practice.



Please pray

- Pray for all girls and women who are at risk of FGM/C. Pray that they will not be forced to have any procedure and that they will be able to make their own choices about their bodies.
- Pray for the people who are upholding the norms around FGM/C – that their perspectives will change.
- Pray that churches will actively speak out against FGM/C.



Day Sixteen:

Transforming thinking

10 December

For survivors and perpetrators of SGBV, the single most empowering thing that we can do is to bring the issue into the light and call it out for the harmful behaviour that it is.

For many women and girls (and men and boys) facing abuse, the problem of the emotional and/or physical trauma it causes is exacerbated by damaging social or cultural norms, which turn a blind eye to, or can sometimes even justify, the abuse. Often, survivors can feel afraid or ashamed to seek help because of the stigma of being perceived as a victim, or because of the shame of feeling convinced that, in some way, they were deserving of the abuse and no one will be there to champion their cause, to hear their pain, or to stand with them.

Transforming Masculinities training has been a key pillar in the response to sexual violence in Myanmar. Tearfund has worked with church leaders to provide training in this area. Even for many pastors, the notion of power imbalance within the church and how that affects women, especially survivors, had never been seen as an issue. One church leader says he realised during the training 'We use lots of power in our church without noticing. It is also very harmful and violating.'

Transforming Masculinities training provides the opportunity to strengthen awareness among church leaders about SGBV as well as to create a safe space for survivors and has been shown to help significantly lower instances of SGBV within communities.

Creating both awareness and understanding of the issue, along with a safe environment for survivors to speak out and be heard, is something for all of us to be a part of wherever we are. You can make a difference.

Thank you for joining us on this *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence*. Please continue to pray and to find ways to speak out against SGBV and support those who are survivors.



Please pray

- Thank God for champions, men and women, who are speaking out against SGBV.
- Pray for leaders to be more aware and more understanding of the issues surrounding SGBV and to be motivated to make changes that protect survivors.
- Pray for survivors of SGBV to feel safe to find help and support in their journey to healing, justice and freedom.



Further Resources

Tearfund:

[For more information on Tearfund work on Sexual and Gender based violence](#)

Restored (Domestic Abuse Charity):

www.restored-uk.org

Confidential helpline

If you have been affected by any of the information above and would like to speak to someone confidentially, contact your church leader or please call National Domestic violence Helpline (UK): **0808 2000 247**

If you are based overseas, please go to www.hotpeachpages.net to find a helpline.

tearfund.org

Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE, United Kingdom

+44 (0)20 3906 3906 ✉ campaigns@tearfund.org [f](#) [@](#) [/Tearfund](#)

Registered office: Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE. Registered in England: 994339. A company limited by guarantee. Registered Charity No. 265464 (England & Wales) Registered Charity No. SC037624 (Scotland) 00600-(1023)

📍 Irene, a nurse and midwife in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Photo: Daniel Msirikale/Tearfund

tearfund