

Act Justly Update 9

God of all comfort

Most of us will never forget Boxing Day 2004, when a tsunami caused huge waves travelling as fast as aeroplanes to smash into the countries of the Indian Ocean. An estimated 250,000 people died in 13 countries; millions were left homeless and some 1.5 million lost their livelihoods. This update looks at how we can offer comfort to those who are still suffering.

Ice breaker

Think back to Boxing Day 2004. Where were you, and what were you doing? When did you hear about the tsunami? How did you feel and react when you heard about it?

Worship

'In my mind is the memory of that moment and of the wave as high as the palm trees. I lived in that house for 42 years and now there is nothing left.'
Seetha (42), Nagore, southern India.

After considering the facts and figures, and hearing Seetha's words, read Psalm 145. You can read it in a group or alone, or listen as one person reads.

Tim Hughes, *God of all comfort* © 2002, Thankyou Music

Tim Hughes, *I've had questions* © 2003, Thankyou Music

Matt Redman, *Blessed be your name* © 2002, Thankyou Music

Graham Ord, *The Lord is gracious and compassionate* © 1998, Vineyard Songs



Some shelters built by Christian Aid partner Sneha

Chinnamedu village is a small fishing community of 146 families in Tamil Nadu, southern India. Situated 100m from the seashore, it was completely destroyed in the tsunami. Six people lost their lives and 70 homes were washed away. Local Christian Aid partner Sneha was on the scene immediately, providing aid in the first few days after the tsunami. In August 2005 they built long-term temporary shelters for the community, to give families somewhere comfortable to live while they waited for permanent homes.

The shelters are made from thatched palm leaves that are much cooler than corrugated iron or other building materials. They are smaller than some shelters, and offer villagers some privacy, which they would not get in larger shelters.

Rajalakshmi (20) had her son, Mukesh, four months ago in the temporary home she shares with her husband and mother-in-law. 'Bringing up a child when you've lost everything is hard,' Rajalakshmi explains, 'but living in these shelters is better than not having a roof over our heads. I wouldn't be able to have a baby in some of the other temporary shelters I've seen – they would be too hot and uncomfortable for him. We would have to sleep outside.'

Women are the backbone of the fishing industry in India. The government did not give them compensation for their equipment that was destroyed by the waves, so Sneha gave the fish sellers buckets, tins and raincoats, enabling them to return to work.

As well as offering practical help, Sneha also offers emotional support. For example, they set up a children's parliament to encourage young people to voice their concerns and needs. Sneha then helps them find solutions to these difficulties.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

1. Paul begins this passage with 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Paul has endured considerable hardships and persecution, yet still he is praising God. How does this make you feel? How do you tend to react to your own suffering?

2. Paul continually speaks of 'we'. What message is he giving by doing this?

3. In this passage Paul is talking from personal experience. He knows that God is his Father. He knows that God is often moved to compassion. What does compassion mean? How can we show compassion to the poorest of our brothers and sisters?

4. Paul is showing the Corinthian Christians that their lives are intertwined with his. What affected Paul affected the Corinthians and vice versa. How does the suffering of people across the world impact on you? Are you compassionate or apathetic? How do you think you could increase your compassion for those who suffer?

5. Read about Christian Aid partner Sneha. In what ways is 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 relevant to those who suffered in the tsunami?

6. The Sanskrit word *sneha* means affection. Paul tells us that God responds to suffering with the provision of comfort. In what ways do you think Christian Aid partner Sneha (Social Need, Human and Education Awareness) is offering comfort to the people it works with?



A woman shows off the fish she bought from the fishermen

Further study

1. Read 1 John 4:7-12. Which verses stand out to you? How can you live out the command to 'love one another' practically?

2. Read Luke 24:36-49 and Romans 8:11. What light do these passages shed on suffering?

3. Read Lamentations 2:11-13. This is what many people in the world suffer. Use this passage to help you empathise with those who suffer.

Our response

1 Pray

- Paul tells the Corinthians that their prayers are extremely valuable. Pray for Christian Aid partner Sneha and for all those who are still suffering as a result of the tsunami.
- Ask God to increase your compassion for those who are suffering across our world.

2 Act

- Visit Christian Aid's online tsunami exhibition, 'every time I see the sea...' at www.christianaid.org.uk/tsunami/index.htm or find out where it is being exhibited locally at www.christianaid.org.uk/tsunami/index_2.htm
- Find out more about Christian Aid's work in Asia and take the opportunity to ask questions by inviting someone from your local Christian Aid office to come and speak.

3 Give

- This Christmas, Christian Aid is asking people to 'give a gift that matters'. One thousand pounds would pay for five shelters like the ones that Sneha built – could your church raise some money this Christmas? (All money raised will go into our emergencies fund and distributed wherever the need is greatest.)
- Alternatively, you can buy a gift with a difference from the *Present Aid* catalogue, or by visiting www.presentaid.org.uk