

LIFEWORDS

Lifewords Prayer, March 2019

“Some women from our group of Jesus’ followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.”

Luke 24:22-24 NLT

“Just as the women had said.” A little phrase at the end of verses that many of us have read or heard countless times. A little phrase, but with such significance.

Earlier in Luke we are told that after the women visited the empty tomb, they ran back to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive. All of the men, except Peter, dismissed what they had to say: “The story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn’t believe it” (Luke 24:11). Not only was the story incredulous, but it was coming out of the mouths of women – their testimony would have been considered worthless in first century Palestine.

In Matthew 28 we are told that the women also encounter the risen Jesus. By choosing women to be the first witnesses to the resurrection – the most important event in history – God turns the normal way of doing things on its head, using some of the least “important” people in the society to share the good news.

This upside-down, disruptive, counter-cultural way of doing things is often the way God works (1 Corinthians 1:27). In a culture where women were at best looked down on, and at worst oppressed, we see how God chooses to lift them up, use them for the gospel, and give them their place at the most important moment in history.

Welcome to the March edition of Lifewords Prayer. This month is a special issue as we dedicate our stories to the work and transformation of women around the world. Join us in prayer as we celebrate International Women’s Day, gear up towards Easter, share news from Pavement Project in Brazil, and hear from the Prison Fellowship in Northern Ireland.

3–9 March

Balance for Better

Each year on the 8th March, communities all around the world observe International Women's Day. Set aside by the United Nations, many use this day as a time to reflect on the positive progress that's been made, and to make calls for further change.

- The theme of this year's International Women's Day is Balance for Better. With women disproportionately affected by poverty, oppression, violence, and trafficking, initiatives will be focusing on the importance of gender balance across the world. Please pray for groups, churches, and organisations who have planned events and activities in line with the campaign. Pray too for those celebrating the achievements of women worldwide, that they may be inspired to help drive future change.
- Lifewords is committed to supporting and championing people everywhere with God's love. Emily* is one of the women at Azalea – a Luton-based charity working to help and support women caught in sexual exploitation. In 2016, Lifewords and Azalea created a Bible booklet, by and for vulnerable women, called *Consider the Wildflowers*. "I always thought I was rubbish at everything," says Emily. "But being asked to contribute to *Consider the Wildflowers* with my words, thoughts, and writing made me feel valued. When I showed my social worker my contribution, she cried. Thank you for giving me a voice that can help others." Give thanks as we celebrate acts of courage and determination by women like Emily who have played an extraordinary role in their communities.
- With an estimated 40-42 million women in prostitution worldwide, Lifewords has expanded *Consider the Wildflowers* to include translations in Bulgarian, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish. Give thanks for the prayerful and financial support from churches, trusts, organisations, and individuals making the development of this specialist resource possible. Pray that *Consider the Wildflowers* will prove transformative in women's lives around the world.

*Name has been changed.

Please visit www.lifewords.global/wildflowers if you would like to find out more about *Consider the Wildflowers*.

10–16 March

Day Three: Believe the Women

This Easter, Lifewords has produced a brand-new Bible resource to share with your church and community. *Day Three: Believe the Women* tells the story of the women who followed Jesus – and the day that changed everything. Using passages from the Bible's Easter narrative and thought-provoking illustrations, this booklet challenges us to share the Easter story in a fresh way this year.

- *Day Three: Believe the Women* follows on from the events in the Lifewords booklet, *One Friday* – it's the story of what happens next. *Day Three: Believe the Women* focuses on the women in the Bible who were first to witness the miracle of the resurrection – but were not believed. The booklet invites us to challenge our way of thinking and draw on historical events that are still relevant today. Ask that God would continue to speak to us and help us be receptive to new learning and fresh perspectives.

- Revd Helen Paynter is the Director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence (CSBV). After receiving her copy of *Day Three: Believe the Women*, she shared her thoughts with us: "This account of Resurrection Sunday places a particular emphasis on the extraordinary role of women in the story. It consists of direct excerpts from the gospel accounts juxtaposed with gritty, contemporary images of modern women. This sheds a fresh and vivid perspective on the old story, which continues to be meaningful in every new generation." Please pray for those who read *Day Three: Believe the Women*, that minds and hearts would be moved and changed.
- Since its release in February, already over 8,500 copies of *Day Three: Believe the Women* have been ordered – thank you! These resources will be shared at many different Easter events, activities, and services around the UK. Give thanks for the excitement and readiness of people who are motivated to share the Bible's life words. Please pray for the planning processes of the services and events, and for those who will be attending.

Please visit www.lifewords.global/easter to receive a free sample copy of *Day Three: Believe the Women*. You can also join the conversation on social media using the hashtags #D3BTW, and #BelieveTheWomen.

17–23 March

A Brazilian family restored

For more than 18 years, Pavement Project has worked with countless families, children, and young people around the world. Here's one of the many stories of God working through Pavement Project:

- Maria* from Brazil once struggled with regular drug use. This impacted the relationship with her family, and particularly with her two daughters. Maria's children began to lose weight and expressed that they felt neglected. Please pray for families in Brazil that experience drug abuse and other forms of deprivation. Ask God to intervene to bring about more stable family environments.
- One day a Pavement Project worker met with Maria's daughters. Together they spoke openly about their feelings, shared their thoughts on what they want a family to be, and learned about God's love and care for their lives. Following the session, the Pavement Project worker was able to meet with Maria and counsel the family together. They shared time in prayer and asked God to restore their family. This started a journey of healing that included the mother receiving professional help with her addiction. Give thanks for transformation and restoration, and pray for progress as the family continues to heal and rebuild their relationship.
- "I can't explain this special moment," says the Pavement Project worker. "It's a feeling of gratitude and accomplishing God's mission. We're very grateful to God for allowing us to be part of this special journey. Seeing the joy of the girls has been an emotional moment I can't explain." Give thanks for the Pavement Project team and the time they dedicate into helping people experience God's love and hope. Please pray for their mental, physical, and spiritual health as they carry out this difficult work.

**Name has been changed.*

To help make more of these stories a reality, please visit www.lifewords.global/give. Your gifts support the urgent work, training and resources of Pavement Project.

24–30 March

God's love transcends all

Prison Fellowship Northern Ireland (PFNI) is a Christian ministry responding to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical needs of inmates, released prisoners, and their families. PFNI have been using Lifewords booklets for the past 20 years as they work to offer hope and new beginnings. We talked to Chief Executive, Robin Scott, who ordered 360 copies of *Finding Hope* in December.

- “Each year, we provide the children and families of prisoners we support with food and toy hampers for Christmas,” says Robin. “This is our annual Christmas Hope Project, and this year we were able to give almost 400 homes a special hamper. Each one contained a set of non-perishable groceries, age-specific toys for the children, a specially-designed Christmas card, a diary, and a copy of *Finding Hope*. It’s all about opening doors. You can’t get away from the reality that a box of groceries can make such a difference on the table of these families.” Give thanks for the work and generosity of PFNI. Please pray for every home that received a hamper, that they may discover and experience God’s love and comfort during difficult times.
- PFNI supports all prisons in Northern Ireland and have opportunities to run Bible studies too. “Prisons in Northern Ireland are very open to us sharing the Christian faith with inmates,” says Robin. “It’s great being able to partner with Lifewords. The booklets are a tangible demonstration of God’s love. They help us share the message of hope with prisoners in a refreshing way. They’re also visually attractive and well-produced. For us, it’s worth sharing.” Praise God that Northern Ireland’s prison system is open and receptive to the Christian faith, and give thanks for the hundreds of Lifewords booklets that have been given to inmates over the years.
- “Although the prisons allow us to openly talk about God’s love, around 80% of inmates have little or no Christian faith,” says Robin. “We recently supported a lovely Muslim family. A relative had been sentenced to some time in prison, but the family was happy for us to visit them at home. Over the months we provided support in various ways. One of the family members then said, ‘We are Muslim, and you are Christian – but still you loved us.’” Give thanks for the radical love that breaks barriers and transcends race, gender, stereotypes, politics, and religion. Please pray for prisoners, that they may discover God’s forgiveness and salvation.

Please visit www.lifewords.global/shop to view and order Bible booklets from Lifewords in English and non-English languages.

Thank you for praying with us! Your partnership in prayer is vital to all that we do as we share the Bible’s life words around the world. You can also make a donation to our work online at www.lifewords.global, by post, or by calling 020 7730 2155.