

# Prayer at the Coal Face



Local and global events are stark reminders to us that all is not right with this world. What God created and declared to be good at the beginning of time is noticeably ‘not good’ in this twenty-first century.

BY COLONEL HEATHER RODWELL

History reveals many repeats of similar situations that we are currently facing. We are aware of a world in desperate crisis and may feel even our best efforts are futile to defeat what is threatening our survival. It is tempting to sit nonchalantly by or distract ourselves with things because we’re okay, but these responses fly in the face of who we are called to be as God’s people.

It can be overwhelming—even paralyzing—to take on board the desperate needs of places like Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia and South Sudan, each

country frequently featured in our news bulletins yet just as quickly slipped into the margins when newer stories occur. To be honest, they fall quickly off my radar. Last month we were alerted to the desperate plight of the people of Afghanistan when once again the Taliban occupied the capital city of Kabul, threatening the futures of women and children in particular. Some of us gathered in clusters online to pray; and many of us ‘liked’ the posts that called us to prayer, but how effective do we feel in this space?

## Worldwide issues

This edition of *War Cry* draws our attention again to issues of modern slavery and human trafficking—an area of mission The Salvation Army actively works in worldwide. This aligns completely with our mission. But let’s be honest, for many of us this feels like something disconnected and remote because we have little personal

experience of what this means. How will we make an authentic prayer response to what we read in the resources provided?

When the stats tell us that over 82 million people are currently displaced in this world—that means separated from their homeland with no possibility

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of return—and the prophets of climate change add their burden on us, and we're wondering what sort of world our children and grandchildren will inherit, how can prayer be effective and powerful within these areas of concern? And none of us needs reminding of the pandemic that's continuing to interrupt our lives, with no intention of going away anytime soon.

### Prayer changes things

At times such as this, we're helped by reaffirming our belief that prayer can change things. Twentieth century author and speaker Elisabeth Elliot reminds us: 'Prayer lays hold of God's plan and becomes the link between his will and its accomplishment on earth. Amazing things happen, and we are given the privilege of being channels of the Holy Spirit's prayer.' Read that again slowly and let it sink in. Her belief and encouragement to us is that in prayer we lay hold of God's plan and God's will and we become instrumental in seeing this fulfilled.

Corrie ten Boom's remarkable story of survival within Ravensbrück concentration camp in World War II provides us with another example of prevailing faith in the face of extreme circumstances. These are her words: 'The wonderful thing about praying is that you leave a world of not being able to do something, and enter God's realm where everything is possible. He specialises in the impossible. Nothing is too great for his almighty power. Nothing is too small for his love.'

Maybe your prayer doesn't feel that powerful, however, the power of prayer doesn't rest on the one praying, but the one receiving it. Romans 8:26–27 reminds us: '...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.'

### One with the heart of God

We can be sure that when we come before God lifting our genuine burden for matters too great to comprehend that he hears our sighs and sees our tears as expressions of our deepest longings. The act of simply sitting in silence extending

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our open hands in prayer is the prayer God receives and understands. The gift we have given the world in these moments—whether they be minutes or hours—is the acknowledgement that we are one with the heart of God for his kingdom to come, when all things will be according to his will. We are changed in the offering of this prayer, as inadequate as we may feel in the offering.

When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them to pray, Jesus gave a pattern of prayer which we usually call The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4). As we pray, we are acknowledging there is one who transcends our common life and yet is actively engaged with it. We call him 'Father in heaven', and we revere who he is as we say 'hallowed be your name'. And immediately we deep dive into the boldest of requests: 'your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. Isn't that the crux of our desire as we look around the world as depicted in our news bulletins? Everything within us screams: 'This is not right. There's another design; there's a higher purpose; there's a promised hope.'

### Courageous prayer

It takes courage to pray this way; unwilling to remain on the sidelines and simply lament the state of things or turn away from them, we choose to take our place on the battlefield.

When Paul the Apostle wrote to the church in Corinth he reminded them and also us: 'The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:4–5). This is fighting talk! And there's training involved in praying in the heat of the battle. The Word of God becomes a resource to us

because of the many accounts of God's action through his people when they stood their ground and waited for him to act.

Psalms provides us with a whole hymnbook of prayers that are raw and real which we can adopt as our own. And coming together in prayer with others multiplies the effectiveness of each prayer.

In the concluding affirmations of his first epistle, John stresses this to his readers: 'This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us' (1 John 5:14). No matter how overwhelmingly impossible our prayers may seem, God hears.

*Sometimes the hardest prayer is the one that is left unsaid, becoming instead of a burden we carry with us, the voice inside our head telling us this is impossible, too late, too large, too much for you Lord God to do anything.*

*Forgive our lack of faith, our too small understanding of your love and power.*

*Grant us courage to unwrap those silent, hidden prayers and place them in your hands, where all things are possible.*

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