



Praying for the Millennium Development Goals to transform life for women and girls

The Millennium Development Goals are eight promises, agreed in 2000 by 189 nations. They set out the ways that the world needs to change by 2015, increasing justice and equality and bringing half a billion people out of extreme poverty. How much they do or don't succeed will have an enormous impact on women and their daughters as women are more likely to live in poverty than men.

2010 marks 10 years since the promises were made and there are only 5 years left to make them reality. Prayer and practical action are both needed to overcome the spiritual and economic forces behind poverty.

The prayers and background information set out here are designed to give a feminine perspective on the 8 basic issues of poverty outlined in the Millennium Development Goals.

The prayers will culminate on Sunday October 10, 2010 (10.10.10) when 100 million Christians around the globe will pray and promise together to declare God's love for all in desperate need and to take action.



There is a global prayer available at www.micah2010.org for churches and women's groups to use, which is a great tool to remind us that we belong to God's worldwide family. A snapshot of the church family shows that within a generation, a "typical" Christian will be a young black woman. How important it is to support and encourage women and girls spiritually, socially and economically.

10.10.10 gives us a chance to recommit our energies, to seek forgiveness for being distracted and to speak out with a message of hope. For each MDG, there is an activity suggestion. Please adapt them and use as creatively as you want around the time of 10.10.10.

Of course we hope that Christian women will pray and take action beyond 2010 so that churches, individuals and governments can bring change.

You can find other ideas for 10.10.10 at www.micah2010.org.

Goal 1

Stop extreme poverty and hunger

Poverty is at the root of many of the problems facing women today. It stops mothers from providing the nutritious food their children need. It stops women from accessing medical help. It makes teenage girls vulnerable to traffickers, or to selling themselves for sex. Poverty limits the choices women have and because they often lack control of family resources they are reliant on men - their husband or father.

Rural women tend to suffer far more than rural men. Much of the work they do is unpaid and undervalued. Their low social status in most societies is a major contributor to chronic poverty. Substantial evidence from many countries shows that focusing on the needs and empowerment of women is one of the keys to human development (IMF, 2001).

Pray

Pray for the millions of women who struggle to provide food for their families and whose families struggle to survive. Ask God to inspire action in our leaders so 500 million people can live more hopeful lives in the next 5 years.



Pray for the 900 million women who live in dire poverty (70% of the total according to UNDFW). Give them strength to cope with daily life and provide new opportunities so that they can fulfil their potential.

Activity Idea

We all know what it is like to be a bit hungry. But most of us are only hungry for a short time before we have some food. Many women struggle to provide enough food for their families and the food they have lacks nutrients and vitamins.

If you were hungry every day, and saw your children going hungry, what effects would that have on your body and health and mind?

When you have your next meal, pray for women who do not have enough to provide for their families.

Goal 2

All children finish primary education

When children go to school, they learn skills which prepare them for adult life. Primary education equips girls to understand health issues, helps them see new opportunities to earn a living in the future and helps them move away from poverty and subsistence.

More girls than boys miss out on the opportunity to go to school and they are more likely to drop out early to help with household tasks. In many poor places, education for girls has traditionally not been seen as important. Globally, 20% of primary-aged girls are out of school, compared to 16% of boys - but the difference is far greater in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

However it is impossible to generalise about education for girls and women. Lack of opportunity is an issue of concern in many poor countries but in the West, it is often girls who outperform boys at school and college. We talk of girls in poor communities not having opportunities to work while young women in rich countries may struggle to take time off from work to raise a family.

Pray

Pray for wisdom as you bring up your own boys and girls that God will show you how to encourage their unique qualities. Thank God for the volunteers and churches who work hard in many places to provide schools and preschools. Pray for girls around the world to have positive role models in church and school.

Activity Idea

Think about the education experience of your own family. Compare the education you and your sisters have received and aim to achieve with your mother and your grandmother's education. What are your hopes for your daughters? How easy or difficult has it been for girls in your generation to finish school, go to college/university?

Goal 3

Girls and boys have equal treatment and rights

In many cultures, girls don't have the same opportunities as boys. People can assume that they don't need to go to school, as their future role may be in the home rather than the workplace. But whether or not they eventually go out to work, girls need to learn so that they are empowered to make their own decisions, find employment if they choose, and eventually bring up their own children to be healthy and educated.

Boys and girls are equally valuable in God's eyes. The Bible says that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

Studies show that in developing countries such as Burkina Faso, Bangladesh and South Africa, the more a woman contributes to household income, the more money is spent on food and childcare and the less is spent on alcohol and tobacco. Other studies in Brazil and the Ivory Coast, show that children whose mothers contribute more to family income have a higher daily caloric intake, weigh more, and are taller (IRDC)



Pray

Please pray for families and communities around the world to recognise that boys and girls are equally important and to value the role that girls and women play in society.

Pray for all girls to get the chance to go to school, learning skills that will help them be healthy and fulfilled.

Activity Idea

Make a cut-out of a person-shaped outline. In the middle, write "God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female and blessed them. Genesis 1:27" Down one side, write or draw good things about being male. On the other side, write or draw good things about being female.

Was this a hard task? Pray that you and your friends would always appreciate the qualities of men and women.

Goal 4

Reduce the numbers of children dying

Every day, 27,000 children die because of hunger or preventable disease. This is a tragedy for families and especially hard for mothers.

Children under five are the most vulnerable, and the goal for 2015 is to reduce their mortality rate by two-thirds. Clean water, breast feeding, and good nutrition are vital. Good medical care can stop minor health problems becoming more serious, and routine vaccinations protect children from measles and other potentially life-threatening diseases. It is wonderful that UNICEF was able to vaccinate 1 million under-5s in Iraq in 2008.

Pray

Pray for the health of little children so that they all reach their fifth birthday. Pray for women who have little education to be able to learn about good nutrition and health. Thank God that vaccination programs can protect children from diseases like measles.

Activity Idea

Do you have birthday cakes or special birthday foods? Every birthday is special but sadly many little children around the world die before their fifth birthday. Nearly all these children's lives could be saved with some simple measures.

Arrange for your women's group or youth group to have a "Survive Past 5" birthday party. Share ideas on how you can help children reach their 5th birthdays. Put five candles on a cake and as you light each candle, pray

1. for children who will be born today that they would grow up healthy and cared for
2. that all children would have someone to care for them and love them
3. that children born in 2010 would see the benefits of actions made to meet the MDGs
4. Thank God for parents and other adults who care for children. Pray that they would have love, wisdom and resources to be good carers.
5. Pray that children around the world would have the opportunity to grow as Jesus did- to be strong, full of wisdom and blessed by God (Luke 2:40).

Goal 5

Improve health for girls and women who are pregnant

In the poorest parts of the world, mothers frequently die in pregnancy and childbirth. When mothers are unhealthy during pregnancy, their babies can be born underweight and weak. Without a skilled midwife or birth attendant present, babies are much more likely to contract diseases like tetanus at birth, or be harmed during delivery. Last year over 60 million women gave birth without any help from a skilled attendant.

Children who lose their mothers are very vulnerable, often having to take on adult responsibilities too early, caring for siblings and earning money to support themselves. But it does not have to be like this.



Pray

Pray for more midwives to be trained, so that all women can have a skilled attendant with them as they give birth. Pray for communities to value girls and women so they can be healthy in pregnancy. Pray for protection for all children growing up without their parents. Pray that they would find support from their extended families, communities and governments.

Activity Idea

Discuss the experiences of childbirth of women in your family and among your friends. (If this is a rather sensitive issue (!), discuss the number of children you and your friends have or hope to have. Compare that with your mother's generation. Have things changed? Why?

In the West it is very rare for a baby or young child to die, in the developing world it is very common. Pray for God to help you support girls and women in your community and around the world so they can be healthy and wise mothers.

Goal 6

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

HIV/AIDS affects millions of girls and women around the world. And often these women are innocent victims infected by unfaithful husbands. Last year, around 500,000 died of the disease, and already 15 million have been orphaned by it. A key way to fight the spread of the disease is through education, as many young people are unaware of how it is passed on, and how they can protect themselves.

Babies can be infected with HIV in the womb, during birth or through breastfeeding. Providing the right drugs for HIV-positive mothers can halve the number of babies infected in this way.

Pray

Pray for effective communication and education about HIV/AIDS, and for healthcare which can protect unborn children from the disease. Pray that cheap drugs be available to all people with the disease regardless of their wealth. Pray for Christians to set an example of faithful, caring partnerships.

Pray for churches to deal with the issues of infection and the effects of the disease honestly and sensitively.

Activity Idea

Your church might want to have a lesson for all children and teenagers about HIV/AIDS prevention, so that they know facts about the disease. It is important to be honest with children about the disease.

Please pray for children you know who have lost a mum or dad to HIV/AIDS, that they will be supported by the church and know God's care.

Goal 7

Care for the environment

Easy access to clean water is a great bonus for communities, especially for the girls and women whose job it is to collect water. A well or pump in the village or town means that girls spend less time in the back-breaking labour of fetching water, a task that can take hours each day. Clean water also means better health and freedom from energy sapping disease. The aim is to halve the number of people worldwide who lack access to basic sanitation and clean water, by 2015.

Governments need to address these issues at the national level, through good water treatment schemes and infrastructure like pipes. Local communities can also work together to bring change: hygiene education can promote hand-washing and ways to avoid contamination, and building wells and latrines can have a huge impact on health and quality of life.

Diseases as "harmless" as diarrhoea cause many thousands of deaths amongst children each year, and safe water would prevent these lives being wasted. Care for the environment should be a special priority for Christians - the Earth is God's and we are asked to care for his creation.

Pray

Pray for sanitation to be a priority for governments, particularly in China and India where 1.5 billion people lack adequate facilities. Thank God that levels of access to clean drinking water have improved dramatically since 1990. Give communities



confidence to work together on projects. Pray that all people would value God's creation and care for it.

Activity Idea

God asks us to care for His creation so that our children can enjoy its beauty when they are grown up.

Think of 3 different things you and your family can do to look after God's creation eg, use water carefully, plant trees in your community, recycle your rubbish, grow vegetables in your family garden, use electricity wisely, reject packaging.

What is your government doing to protect the environment? If you think they could do better, tell them!

Goal 8

Make fair global rules for development

Governments and international groups need to take responsibility to support the most vulnerable and today, even as in Biblical times, it is women and girls who are the most at risk. We may not like to consider it but 250,000 girls are forced into prostitution each year and millions of young women in poverty lack any choices about their future. We need governments to work in partnership in partnership so that systems are fairer and laws are enforced to protect the suffering and punish those who harm and exploit. The Bible is clear about the responsibilities of our rulers -

Reducing or cancelling the debts of the poorest countries often enables these nations to spend money on services for like healthcare and education. While they are tied to paying back huge sums of interest to rich countries, they have very little spare to meet the needs of the poor.

Making sure that trade systems are fair is another important role for governments. Real justice for poor countries, without crippling taxes and barriers, can help them start to sell more goods and become stronger economically. This brings security for families, job opportunities for young people once they are grown up, and often a more stable government which can focus on the needs of its people.

Government laws can ensure the rights of girls and women to property, job equality and finance. They can make sure health services are available to women and girls in all communities.

But laws alone are not enough. Christian women can stand together to call for equality, protection and justice, so that all girls and women can realise their potential to be beautiful daughters of God.

Pray

Please pray for the world's powerful countries to keep their promises to cancel debt. Pray that the money saved will be invested wisely by poorer nations, so that children benefit.

Pray for wisdom for national leaders, as they decide on trade and aid policies which will affect the poor. Pray that they would look beyond their own countries' interests and consider the implications for the rest of the world.

Pray that laws put in place about trafficking are enforced.

Activity Idea

Discuss together what rules you have in your family. Why do we need rules?

How did Jesus treat women and children? What can we learn from the examples you have discussed?

Can you think of any laws that are especially important for women?

We need rules and laws to protect small or weak countries, rules to make sure countries are just, rules to punish greed.

Please pray for leaders to make rules and laws that reflect God's justice.

All statistics from UNICEF (www.unicef.org)

This prayer guide is adapted with kind permission from an idea of the Viva Network, an international network of Christian groups working with children at risk. www.viva.org

See also the activities described in the "The Global Prayer" and "The BIG Promise".