

Written prayers

Interceding for peace to come to conflict situations

This collection consists of eight prayers, as follows;

- *A prayer of preparation: a 'way in' to praying for conflict*
- *A down to earth prayer for peace*
- *A prayer of intercession for conflict*
- *A pivotal prayer for peace*
- *A prayer for peace talks*
- *A prayer of blessing for the peacemakers*
- *Writing the conflict story: prayers for politicians and the media*
- *A prayer on the role of fear in conflict*
- *A meditation on Jeremiah 39: experiencing conflict through imagination*

The prayer of preparation is intended as an opening prayer for a longer session of prayers on conflict, while the remaining five can be used on their own or in any combination you choose. Apart from the meditation on Jeremiah and the prayer on the role of fear in conflict, all the prayers can be used either for conflict generally or for conflict in a particular place; for the latter, simply include the words in square brackets and substitute the letter 'n' for the name/s of the place/s involved.

A prayer of preparation

If you are planning an extended session of prayer for conflict, this prayer is offered as 'way in' – a reflective prayer of self-examination and confession designed to open up possibilities for praying creatively and compassionately for those involved in the conflict. It can be adapted for a particular conflict by using the additional words in square brackets.

Leader Ever-present and compassionate God, we gather together to bring you our prayers for [the] conflict [in n] and the suffering that it brings.

God of wisdom and grace, prepare us to pray with compassion, hope and love, as relationships are severed between individuals and peoples; as grief, loss, anger and despair are experienced daily and deeply; as the experience of normality is shattered and uncertainty and fear become constant companions to those affected by [the] conflict.

God of all knowledge, we come before you, each with our own understanding of [the] conflict [in n], each acknowledging the limits of our understanding. We recognise that what we know may be vastly outweighed by what we do not know or understand of what has caused and what perpetuates this conflict. Help us to pray within the limits of our own knowledge and within your limitless capacity to bring about reconciliation.

Pause

All **Grant us wisdom, dear Lord, that our prayers may be clothed in compassion.**

Leader Merciful God, guard us against condemning those who perpetrate this violence, since condemnation closes our minds and stifles our prayers. Reveal to us the moments when our hearts condemn others, and grant us willingness to be transformed. Help us to pray with openness to the real possibility of reconciliation.

Pause

All **Grant us open hearts, dear Lord, that our prayers may be clothed in hope.**

Leader Ever-giving God, we open ourselves to the transforming work of your Spirit, as we acknowledge that we share in the human trait of self-preservation which is so evident in [this] conflict. We ask that you reveal to us those pressure-points which test our own instinct to protect ourselves at cost to someone else; and help us to recognise, in our common instincts and desires, the humanity we share with those who perpetrate this violence.

Pause

All **Grant us humility, dear Lord, that our prayers may be clothed in love.**

Leader God of transformation, we thank you that you are our guide on the journey towards understanding ourselves. And we thank you that this journey does not end with us, but enables us to engage lovingly and creatively in praying for others. As we continue in prayer for [the] conflict [in *n*], grant us the grace to remember what we hold in common with those involved: the desire for safety, for belonging and for love. Draw our prayers from the deep well of compassion which you supply, and bless this time shared together with your transforming power.

All **In the name of Christ our Reconciler, amen.**

A down to earth prayer for peace

First written in February 2015 for Ukraine, but sadly relevant to many places at many times:

This prayer's not for the powerful,
the politicians and the diplomats.
It's not for suited leaders talking of peace
or armed fighters busy waging war.

This prayer's for one powerless woman,
and her boys – still too small to perceive approaching danger.
It's for thousands like her, in endless vigils,
watching through their windows as the shells edge closer.

This prayer's for the frightened,
the innocent and the confused.
This prayer's for the people,
the pawns of higher agendas – the abused.

Oh my God, hear their cries.
Oh my God, be by their side.
Oh my God, thank you that you're there,
down to earth again and again, love drawing close and defeating fear.

This prayer's for me because I too am dwarfed by this huge conflict,
and I prayed you'd help me connect to this place and these people.
And I am also connected to you – powerful, present, loving you:
So keep them on my heart and me on my knees surrendered still.

This prayer's to the Powerful,
the Leader and the King;
it's to the Champion of heaven who walks in real times
and real places with each and every one.

A prayer of intercession for conflict

This prayer is designed to be used for a particular conflict, and gives space to pray for a variety of issues. The section in italics is an optional space to use for situation-specific intercessions.

Leader Lord Jesus, in whom hope endures and burns brighter than the sun,

All We give you honour and praise.

Leader Reconciling Jesus, through whom all relationships that are broken may find a way to heal,

All We give you honour and praise.

Leader Righteous Jesus, for whom justice is immersed in compassion and a longing to bring all creation back to you,

All We give you our love, honour and praise.

Leader Dear Jesus, our loving Saviour, whose heart breaks for the suffering we cause to one another, it is our longing to bring our supplication, our fears and our hopes for the conflict in *n* to you.

All Lord, guide our hearts and our minds as we pray.

Leader Lord Jesus, your perception of human hearts runs more deeply than we can imagine, and your knowledge of what has brought about the conflict in *n* is beyond compare. Where there is confusion or deception over the causes of this violence, let your Spirit breathe truth into the discourse. As the gardener digs to the root of the weed, Lord, enable the roots of this violence to be exposed.

All Jesus, hear our prayer.

Leader Lord Jesus, you have all authority in Heaven and on Earth; grant those who have political or economic authority in *n* compassion and wisdom to use their influence to bring about peace. For those who have so far refused to consider the suffering they have directly or indirectly caused, convict them by your Spirit we pray;

All Jesus, bring truth and transformation to those with authority.

Leader Lord Jesus, we think of those men and women who are at the front line of the fighting in *n*, and all the reasons they may be there, whether as armed forces, paramilitaries or civilians. For those who experience the soul-damage that is caused by hurting or killing another human being, we ask above all, Lord, for your compassion and mercy;

We ask also, Lord, for those who are physically injured in the fighting, that you bless them with patience and strength throughout their healing, and with determination in their re-adjustment to life after injury;

Finally, Lord, we ask for your loving care to strengthen the families and friends of those who are injured or killed in the fighting;

All Jesus, bring healing and hope where there is brokenness.

Leader Lord Jesus, there are so many people caught up in the violence whose daily lives are disrupted beyond recognition; who live in fear for themselves or for their loved ones; who struggle to get hold of the resources they need to survive; who face darkness and despair in the uncertainty of how long the violence in *n* will continue;

All Jesus, bring courage and endurance where there is fear.

Leader Lord Jesus, there are those living in *n* for whom the fear has become too strong, and the reality of violence come too close. We pray for those who have already fled from *n* to find refuge in *n*, and particularly for those who are weak and vulnerable; we are incapable of expressing their need, Lord, and so we bring each desperate and frightened person to you;

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All Jesus, bring comfort and provision where there is unmet need.

Leader Lord Jesus, those of us in other countries rely on the courage and determination of the journalists who report on the violence in *n* to hear the story of the conflict unfold. We thank you deeply for the bravery they display in exposing injustice and suffering;

All Jesus, bring protection where there is insecurity.

Leader Lord Jesus, thank you that there is a voice in *n* to tell us about the conflict, and thank you that the violence has come to international attention; we pray that those countries with influence (such as *n*) will take on the responsibility of trying to shape a possible course to peace with wisdom and compassion;

All Jesus, where there seems to be no path to peace, bring creativity and imagination.

Leader *All those present are now invited to offer particular intercessions for the current situation in n.*

Space for group prayers and/or silence

Leader Dear Jesus, we bring these prayers to you in full knowledge of the limitations of our understanding about the conflict in *n* and the people involved. We ask that you would bless us with humility as we continue to seek ways to pray for situations such as this, which seem so bleak and desperate. Bless us also with compassion, Lord, and above all the hope that comes from your presence even in the darkest of times. For if we pray in faith and hope then we know that through you, all things are possible.

All Loving Jesus, we offer you our hearts in hope and praise. Amen.

A pivotal prayer for peace

This prayer came out of a time of prayer for peace in June where we spent the hour kneeling on our world map carpet and replacing stones with nations' names on with soft, playdough hearts inspired by the image of God replacing hearts of stone with hearts of flesh in Ezekiel (11:19 and 36:26). We found ourselves – of course – praying for the hearts of individual leaders... and amongst them for the ones God knows to be pivotal.

God of all people and all places –
who formed each person in their mother's womb
and knows each heart inside out –
we come to you in confidence
that you can see across borders
behind closed doors
and into the very motives of each person.

We pray today for all people of position , power or influence
with the means to make peace where there currently is none.
We ask that where they have hardened hearts of stone,
you would soften them again into flesh that has compassion for others
and a desire to carry out your purposes of justice and righteousness.
And we pray most of all for those who are especially pivotal today –
those who have softened hearts, or some ground of softness in their hearts,
or those who are beginning to question and to let in the light,
who can speak up for truth and be heard today;
give them boldness and use them to soften others
and bring about strategic and lasting change
for the sake of all who are suffering and afraid
and your Son who died for every single one.

A prayer for peace talks

This prayer was added to this collection by the Sanctuary in October 2013 amid discussions urging the Syrian opposition factions to attend peace talks called Geneva II the next month. Originally written for the Syria crisis, it can be used in any conflict situation to pray for God's presence, perspective and peace to rule over peace talks.

Lord Jesus - Reconciler, Peacemaker
And true friend to nations in distress -

You are always the hope and the healer.
We thank you for all you have done and are doing to soften hearts
and turn minds to dreams of peace and talk of peace.
We thank you for every breakthrough that has led to these talks
and we do not take for granted the miracle that brings warring parties to this place.

We long for more than talk
But we know peace starts here -
With people gathered around a table,
Looking not at ideologies, politics or boundaries
But at other human faces also scarred by pain.
And listening not to policies, plans or proposals
But to other human stories also told in anger.
Here there is a mirror that reveals
The differences they so fervently and distinctly hold
Have led them all here -
To the same darkness,
And the same table,
And the same hope of peace.

We come in confidence with a prayer we know is already answered -
 That you would be there in that room -
 Ensuring no one is absent and everyone is heard,
 Translating between factions,
 Interceding for people,
 And softening their hearts to compromise.
 For the sake of the third way, hopeful future,
 And creative, restorative plan we know you will have,
 Please let them hear you as you speak it
 And be courageous enough to lay down their own agendas
 To embrace it.

We ask these things for the sake of all outside that room
 Who long for - wait for - and desperately need -
 Peace to come.

A prayer of blessing for peacemakers

This prayer of blessing may be used as a general conflict prayer or, by including the words in square brackets, for a particular conflict.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' *Matthew 5:9 NIV*

Leader Lord God, in Christ you bring us the promise and presence of peace, a treasure which transforms us even though we do not fully understand it. Through your people, your

kingdom peace stretches beyond the boundaries of church and nation, and some you bless with the qualities that are able to breach divisions and restore relationships between peoples and nations. [As we consider the conflict in *n*] we bring you thanks and praise for those whom you have called to work for peace; for journalists, peace-making charities, religious leaders, politicians and all others who contribute to the discourse and action involved in bringing about a peaceful settlement [in *n*].

All **Bless each person who recognises and lives out the desire to bring peace, O Lord.**

Leader Lord God, we thank and praise you for the gifts which you bestow upon your peacemakers [in *n*]. From your Spirit flows the patience, energy, discernment, intuition, wisdom and vision which are required to do this work well. We ask for a continued strengthening of all these gifts for your peacemakers [in *n*], and that each person gifted in this way would reflect the glory of your reconciling power back to you.

All **Bless each person who seeks to enact your peace through the gifts you have given them, O Lord.**

Leader Lord God, we thank and praise you for the skills that your peacemakers [in *n*] have

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developed in learning to help bring about peace; skills which are essential to make a place for dialogue as the beginning of reconciliation, and which are rooted in contextual knowledge of the conflict, an understanding of people and an imaginative approach to building bridges that connect damaged relationships. May your Spirit continue to inspire them in developing and using those skills they already employ, and also in discovering and nurturing new ones.

All Bless each person who continues to seek and employ improved knowledge and skill in the pursuit of peace, O Lord.

Leader Dear Lord God, through Christ you made it clear that the peacemakers are blessed because they will be called children of God. May all the riches of this promise be bestowed on those who serve you and your kingdom by working towards peace [in *n*]. We thank and praise you for your continued care and concern over the suffering caused in [this] conflict, and for all you do to resource those who [are] work[ing] towards a peaceful settlement.

All May your Spirit bless your peacemakers with a sense of purpose and fulfilment in the work they do, O Lord, and with the overwhelming knowledge of your loving care for them.

In the name of Christ, amen.

Writing the conflict story: a prayer for politicians and the media

The way the story of a particular conflict is reported is influenced by many factors, some good and some bad. Whether unconscious or deliberate, these influences affect the course of the conflict and any potential peace

settlement. This prayer is for those who are involved in writing the story of the conflict, and can be used either generally or for a specific conflict.

Leader Creator God, you are the author of our lives, and you do not need others' eyes through which to see our stories unfold. We rejoice that your sight is clear and

your understanding unsullied by the ways we misrepresent ourselves to one other. Your justice is rooted in full knowledge of the shadows within each human heart, and is the route to full forgiveness and deep communion with you.

God of compassion, you know that it is a human temptation to obscure the worst of ourselves when self-interest prompts us to. How much, then, are those who influence or control situations of violent conflict tempted to hide the truth of their actions from others – whether to protect themselves and their reputations, or to perpetuate a system that brings profit, resources or power? Lord we offer our prayers for those who hold the power in [this] conflict, and who tell the story the way they want it to be heard.

We bring to you the political leaders at the forefront of [the] conflict [in *n*], in

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their temptation to re-write elements of the narrative for their own personal gain;

All God of peace, grant them knowledge of their own culpability and the strength to admit it, so that suffering and injustice do not remain hidden.

Leader We bring to you the media owners who each have their own interest in [the] conflict [in *n*], whether as a story to sell, a way of promoting a political agenda, or as a fertile ground for profit in other business interests;

All God of peace, grant them understanding of the power they wield, and the wisdom and compassion to use their influence to expose human suffering rather than to hide it.

Leader We bring you the news editors who make daily decisions on what to report [from the conflict in *n*,] and how to report it, and who may be influenced by personal political views or the agendas of those they are financially answerable to;

All God of peace, grant them the courage to report on what is of common human concern, rather than on what promotes any personal or corporate agenda.

Leader We bring you the journalists who investigate [this] conflict [situation], and who write the stories that we receive on how [the] conflict may change, develop and resolve;

All God of peace, grant them clear insight, and the courage to stand by the truths they discover.

Leader God of justice, you gave your Son to the world as a gift of hope and a promise of reconciliation. We did not recognise the value of that gift, which stretches beyond our comprehension across time and space, deep into the world of our

inner lives, and into the relationships we have with one another, and with you.

We come to you in sorrow for the damage we all cause to one another as we fight over resources, power and religion, and yet we know that our sorrow cannot match yours. Ever-giving God, accept our gratitude for your enduring patience with our unending selfishness. We pray that your Spirit will convict all those who use [this] conflict for their own gain with an understanding of the suffering they contribute to through their actions. And in hope we ask that through understanding, they will be transformed from those who demolish peace into those who build it.

All In the name of your Son, in whom the story of every person and every nation can be transformed when we submit ourselves to him, amen.

A prayer on the role of fear in conflict

This is a general conflict prayer which brings to God the problems of fear and ignorance and how they perpetuate violence.

Leader Lord Jesus, in death and resurrection you showed to the whole world that power is at its most potent when subjected to love and a longing for reconciliation. We offer to you our heartfelt desire for all violent conflicts across the world to cease, and for an end to the suffering caused to countless people through injury, death, and the erosion of conscience.

Dear Lord, in the vastness of our universe and the sheer weight of all we do not know, the tendency to fear is rooted within each human heart. When we are confronted with someone whom our leaders teach us is the enemy, the path of ignorance is the easy choice, yet allows hatred to bury its roots into our hearts. And so we reduce other human beings, of your own creation, to objects which seem to have no other purpose than to threaten our own peace and safety.

Merciful Lord, for all people in conflict situations who have lost sight of the humanity of their enemies, we pray that your grace will work into their hearts. Give them the desire and the courage to challenge their own ignorance, and give us the grace also to challenge our own.

All **Through Christ our Reconciler, amen.**

Leader Lord Jesus, you marry power with humility, and clothe them both in love. You confronted your own fear of death and allowed your body to be beaten and broken in order to free us from the chains of our own fear. You gave this freedom as a gift to anyone, anywhere in the world, who is able to recognise and receive it.

Dear Lord, wherever hearts are hardened to others and violence builds, let your power begin to erode the vast walls of ignorance we have constructed. Let us begin to see the humanity in one another which makes us the same – our needs, our feelings, our relationships – and learn, however slowly, to celebrate the differences which teach us so much about one another and about you.

All **Through Christ our Reconciler, amen.**

A meditation on Jeremiah 39 and the experience of conflict

Based on Jeremiah 39:1-10, cf 2 Kings 25:1-26, New International Version

Explain the format: that you will read through the passage once, slowly, and then repeat it with pauses for imaginative meditation and reflection.

Encourage those present to relax: sitting with feet flat on floor, hands on laps, becoming aware of each part of their body and slowly relaxing their muscles. Then read Jeremiah 39:1-10 slowly and clearly.

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Now, begin to read again, pausing between each section and gently making the suggestions supplied to aid imagination and reflection.

Verses 1-2: In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army and laid siege to it. And on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year, the city wall was broken through.

- Imagine yourself in Jerusalem after two years of siege, the mighty Babylonian army surrounding the city; food is scarce and illness rife – you are weak from hunger.
- Picture yourself slowly walking the dusty streets; what is the mood of the city? How does the presence of the Babylonians make you feel?
- As you are walking the noise begins suddenly: the repeated, rhythmic crash of war engines attacking the wall, and eventually the sound of cracking masonry: how do you feel? What do you instinctively do?

Verses 3-4: Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and took seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-Sarsekim a chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officials of the king of Babylon. When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled; they left the city at night by way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls, and headed toward the Arabah.

- You find yourself at the Middle Gate, as the men of Babylon enter in all their authority, a possessive air about them as they look around. How do you respond to their presence? What do you feel?
- King Zedekiah approaches, hiding in the shadows; how does he look after two years of siege? How does he act upon seeing the Babylonian men?
- You watch as the King and his soldiers flee from the Middle Gate; from the Babylonians and from their own people: what immediately goes through your mind as you watch them leave?

Verses 5-7: But the Babylonian army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. They captured him and took him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced sentence on him. There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and also killed all the nobles of Judah. Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon.

- You hear the news from a neighbour: 'Zedekiah is taken – blinded and bound – and his sons slain. We are defeated.'
- What are your fears as you receive the news? What are your hopes? How do you feel about the present? What about the future?

Verse 8: The Babylonians set fire to the royal palace and the houses of the people and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.

- A few weeks later and the Babylonians have returned; you are walking as they march purposefully into the city and their commander issues orders which sound crisp, sharp and harsh.
- Brands are lit, and soldiers carry them from home to home, beginning to torch the city.
- What is your first instinct as the blaze catches? Where do you run to?
- You can see the lines of smoke expanding, approaching the heart of Jerusalem, the heart of your faith in God, as the Temple succumbs to the flames.
- How do you respond as you watch the fire surround the Temple? Are you drawn to prayer?
- The sound of cracking masonry, and you know the walls of Jerusalem – once so strong and mighty! – are falling, and life is forever changed.

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Verses 9-10: Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard carried into exile to Babylon the people who remained in the city, along with those who had gone over to him, and the rest of the people. But Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard left behind in the land of Judah some of the poor people, who owned nothing; and at that time he gave them vineyards and fields.

- The dust has settled – the Babylonians have left, have taken so many into exile, along with almost every article of value or beauty, leaving you simply the ruins of a once great Jerusalem.
- As you consider the departure of so many of your people, including friends and family, how do you feel? Do you imagine how they are feeling?
- In this new life there is both blessing and pain; as you reflect on all you must face, what are you grateful for? What are you going to find the most difficult?
- The greatest question remains in your heart; does God know my suffering?

Leave around 2 minutes of silence at the end and then invite people to return, slowly and gradually, out of the meditative experience.

This prayer can be used as an introduction to discussion and/or an open group prayer time on conflict. If you wish to enter discussion, after the silence invite people to comment on anything that particularly struck them, any new understanding of what it is like to exist within conflict, and any connections made with current conflicts. Then gently introduce a time of open prayers. If you wish to lead directly from the meditation to an open prayer time, ensure you let people know this will happen when you introduce the meditation; then after the silence at the end of the meditation, gently invite anyone present to pray about anything the meditation brought into focus for them.