

Life's first cry



LEADER'S GUIDE

YOU CAN SHARE THE HIDDEN STRUGGLE OF MOTHERS AND BABIES IN AFGHANISTAN



Thank you for deciding to use *Life's First Cry* in your church – I hope that this Leader's guide will inspire you and help you to plan a great mission service. On the following pages you will find fun service ideas, inspiration for a sensitive sermon and suggestions for how you and your church can be raising money to support this BMS World Mission appeal.

Life's First Cry tells the incredible story of how we are helping to save lives in the remote mountain villages of Afghanistan. Hundreds of miles from Kabul, mothers and babies are dying from preventable illnesses and birthing complications that shouldn't cost lives. BMS is working with local people on the ground to help defy the horrific statistics – and by raising money with us, you can keep more mothers and babies alive.

If you've already watched the feature video, you will have met Andisha and Mohammad. (If you haven't yet watched the video – stop reading and watch it now! It sells itself much better than I ever could.) Andisha gave birth to 11 babies, and each one of her precious children died within their first few months of life.

For more than a decade, Andisha was a mum without any children. I find that heartbreaking. But I'm encouraged and proud that everything changed when a group of local women and men came to her village to teach the community a BMS-supported safe-birthing course.

The simple lessons contained within that course transformed Andisha and Mohammad's lives. They are now the proud parents of two beautiful children. I personally sat and talked with Andisha, and she told me: "What we've learnt here is the reason that my children are alive. The lessons you have given us have made all the difference in the world."

I can't do justice to the incredible beauty of God's creation in Afghanistan or the amazing work you're helping to support there; but I hope that, when you and your church watch the feature video, each one of you will experience something of the awe I experienced visiting families in their homes in the mountains.

By supporting *Life's First Cry* this year, your church's gifts can go where you cannot – they can save the lives of babies in Afghanistan, and begin to restore the hope of families who have faced more trouble than most of us here could possibly imagine. Your gifts will also help fund life-transforming work around the world – performing life-saving surgery in Chad, sharing the gospel with people who have never even heard of Jesus in India, and helping widows, orphans and prisoners access justice in Mozambique, to name just a few.

We are aware that the nature of the work we're doing in Afghanistan may trigger painful memories for some members of your congregation. I hope this won't put you off sharing this important story, and if you know of people in your church who may find the video distressing, it might be a good idea to speak to them privately beforehand to prepare them. This is a project that aims to make the pain and distress of losing a child something that fewer people will face. We hope that all people will want to get behind it. So please share *Life's First Cry* sensitively. But do share it!

All that is left to say is that I hope you and your church are inspired by *Life's First Cry* and by God's grace, enabling us to serve people he has created in his image in Afghanistan. Please do encourage your members to give generously to our appeal. I've seen first-hand the impact their gifts can make. They can make "all the difference in the world".

Thank you.

Sarah Stone

Writer and interviewer, *Life's First Cry*

THIS LEADER'S GUIDE CONTAINS:

- P3.** Description of *Life's First Cry* resources
- P4.** Service ideas
- P6.** Sermon outline
- P8.** Fundraising ideas

Feature video

Transport your church to the mountains of Afghanistan to meet mothers and fathers whose lives have been transformed, and babies who are alive because of work they support! Their gifts to *Life's First Cry* can help save more lives.

Reflection video: How beautiful were their steps

Featuring a brand-new poem by Lucy Berry, this short video will help your church reflect on what they've seen in *Life's First Cry*. We suggest taking up the offering during this video – but please do allow time for your members to fill in their gift envelopes first.

PowerPoint quiz

Help your congregation understand how difficult it is for expectant parents to give birth in Afghanistan. (More details on page 5.)

Posters

Download the editable A4 poster or order a printed A3 poster to advertise your *Life's First Cry* event.

Welsh resources

The feature video and PowerPoint quiz are available in Welsh.

Promotional video

Use this video ahead of your *Life's First Cry* service or event to promote the appeal.

Other resources

Gift envelopes, collection jar labels and a remittance slip are available to help your church support this appeal and transform more lives in Afghanistan and around the world.

These resources are available to download from the DVD and/or order from www.bmsworldmission.org/cry or by phoning 01235 517617.

**RESOURCES:
WHAT'S
AVAILABLE?**





ENGAGE YOUR CHURCH: SERVICE IDEAS

Here are a few ideas for fun activities you can do with your congregation before you show *Life's First Cry*.

Service starter: guess the face

A few weeks before your *Life's First Cry* service, ask up to ten members of your congregation to send you a baby photo of themselves. Ask for photos from a range of people – from the oldest member of your church to one of the younger children.

Create a slideshow with one photo per slide, and get people to shout out who they think the baby is. Then ask each mystery person to reveal themselves. At the end of the slideshow, explain that this Sunday the church is going to be learning about some of the work BMS World Mission is doing in Afghanistan to make sure that little babies grow up into strong children and adults – like each of us has done. Explain to the children that all of us, big and small, started life as little babies. How amazing is that?!

How big is a baby?

Bring pieces of fruit and veg into church to represent an unborn baby at different stages during its development. For example, you could bring a poppy seed (four weeks), blueberry (seven weeks), lemon (14 weeks), aubergine (28 weeks), romaine lettuce (36 weeks) and a small pumpkin (40 weeks). (For more ideas, visit www.bit.ly/babysizes)

Starting with the smallest item, ask a child to come up and hold it in the air. Ask them how old they think they were when they were the same size as the thing they are holding – they probably won't believe they were ever that little! Continue like this until you have a row of children holding up the fruit and veg in

order from smallest to biggest. Explain that every human being started life smaller than that tiny poppy seed (or the smallest fruit you have) – and yet God knew us and loved us when we were that tiny. Tell the congregation that the video they are going to be watching later shows how, in Afghanistan, they're helping babies stay strong and grow from the size of a poppy seed to a pumpkin – and then to a healthy baby boy or girl!



Don't panic: the 'what would you do?' quiz

Many villages in the mountains of Afghanistan are hours away from the nearest basic clinic by car (which most people don't have), and in heavy snow it's impossible for them to access medical help. Most families will end up delivering their babies themselves, or with the help of others from the village. To demonstrate how difficult this actually is, get your church involved through our quiz!

Print out the letters 'A', 'B', and 'C' on separate pieces of paper and put them at three different points in the church.

Pick four men from your congregation to come up to the front – if you have any really animated characters in your church, pick them to amuse the rest of the congregation!

Tell the men that they now live in a village in Afghanistan, their wives have gone into labour and they have to help them deliver the baby safely. In Afghan society, it's generally up to the men to make the decisions. Explain that you are going to ask them a series of questions and they have to give their answer by racing to the right point in the church.

To make it funnier (and after consulting your local health and safety expert!) co-opt two extra (strong) people to join each contestant. One person from each team can pose as the 'pregnant woman', and the rest of the team should carry them to the correct answer. This is probably only for your church if you have a lot of physically strong people in it!

You can find the quiz, with the correct answers and explanations as to why the other answers are wrong, on a PowerPoint presentation on the DVD and at www.bmsworldmission.org/cry

Once you've finished the quiz and suitably embarrassed your volunteers, explain that some of the birthing practices they're going to hear on the video sound very strange to us – but when you understand how remote these villages are, and how little medical intervention they have access to, you can understand how hard it is to know the right thing to do. Without the NHS, most of us would have no idea either.

HOW CAN YOUR CONGREGATION GIVE TO LIFE'S FIRST CRY?

Place *Life's First Cry* gift envelopes on the chairs before you start your service. When you take up your BMS offering, your church members can give by placing a cheque or cash into the gift envelope. If people don't have cash on them, you may want to draw attention to the fact they can also pledge a gift to BMS. We will then follow up with them directly to enable them to give – you don't have to chase them up!

People can also text to give, phone us to make a donation, or give online. All of the necessary details are contained on the gift envelope. Please do give your congregation time to fill in their details on the envelopes before taking up your offering.

Thank you in advance for encouraging your church's generosity! Their gifts can help more mums and dads like Andisha and Mohammad.





SERMON OUTLINE

By Rev Margaret Gibbs

Baptist minister and former BMS mission worker Margaret Gibbs shares ideas for a short sermon based on *Life's First Cry*. We suggest it might work well to give your sermon after watching the video and taking up your BMS offering.

INTRODUCTION: TAKING A RISK

*Genesis 3: 16
I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour you will give birth to children.*

Childbirth, even in a modern, scientific world, is still a miraculous, mysterious and unpredictable phenomenon. Not only in Afghanistan, but in many other cultures around the world today, traditional beliefs determine the practices that surround giving birth. Often they imply that childbirth, with its necessary flows of water and of blood, is somehow 'unclean'. Still today many women are obliged to give birth outside the home or hospital, maybe in a stable or cowshed. They often have to spend parts of their monthly cycle outside too. The whole business, risky enough to start with, can be made much more so by traditions handed down over generations, which people are understandably loath to break.

Being born in a stable – does this remind us of anyone?

1. GROANING

*Romans 8: 22
We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

The pains of childbirth provided Paul with an inspiring image to help communicate something world-changing to Christians in Rome. Rome was a power centre; a modern place with access to the

latest technology and ideas, but even Rome was subject to all the risks birth brings. Paul wanted the Roman Christians to understand how mysterious, miraculous, unpredictable and risky bringing into being the kingdom of God is, and yet the whole of creation depends on this birth coming about in order to be fully healed and restored.

The flow of water and blood seen at birth was replicated on the cross. Jesus willingly gave up his life, in agony, to birth a new reality which would be available to everyone.

2. SUFFERING HOPEFULLY

*John 16: 21
A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.*

A risk assessment of all aspects of birth in today's risk-averse society might persuade anyone not to go ahead! However, there is something fundamentally hopeful and forward-looking about human birth. The risks: will pregnancy be possible, will the baby come to term, will the birth happen safely, will the baby survive, thrive, grow up, live and go on to make good decisions? These kinds of questions are the ones that make us live life on the very edge of our seats, filled with fear, hope, despair and joy in turn. To say yes to these risks guarantees a life of uncertainty, and often calls for weeping with those who weep as well as rejoicing with those who rejoice. Jesus, our example, chose such a life, taking

the risk of loving us and offering himself for us with no guarantee that we would reciprocate. Jesus is an optimist who embraces the present risk for the sake of giving hope to others.

*Hebrews 12: 2
For the joy set before him he endured the cross...*

In order for people to benefit from Jesus' unrepeatable sacrifice, they often need to see the love of Christ in action as well as to hear about it in words. An example is helping to provide a better chance of survival for babies born in Afghanistan today, which becomes a vital first step towards enabling people to hear the good news of Jesus for themselves. As the senior tempter Screwtape reminds his junior Wormwood in C S Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, human birth is chiefly a qualification for human death, and is the route to eternal life. The tempter's aim is for each one born to miss this opportunity!

3. LABOURING TOGETHER

*Galatians 4: 19
My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...*

The *Call the Midwife* series often portrays how significant it can be for women giving birth to have help and encouragement in their labour. In spiritual terms, we each have the amazing privilege of helping to form Christ in each other as we labour together. God's purpose for each one born on this planet, from life's first cry to final breath, is to be transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ. He took the risk of being born directly into humanly caused poverty and danger so that babies born in Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world today don't need to be. Good disciples are ready to take risks and to labour together hopefully, here and now, to bring the new creation he announced fully to life.

Walk, hike or run for mothers and babies

When there is a medical emergency in the remote villages where BMS is working in Afghanistan, people will often have to trek over the mountains, carrying the sick person a long way before they are able to flag down a car or find help. Would anyone in your church be willing to do a sponsored walk, hike or run in solidarity with families in these villages?

Here are a few ideas of things members of your church could do:

- **Family walk**

Ask families in your church to do a sponsored walk. Get the children to carry baby dolls to represent babies in Afghanistan, who are often a very long way away from medical help.

- **Hardcore hike**

Ask church members to consider doing a hike in aid of *Life's First Cry*. They can ask people to sponsor them for every mile they walk.

- **Hospital challenge**

Ask the keen runners in your church to plan a run in your village, town or city that goes past every doctors' surgery/hospital in the area and ends up at the church. Get people to sign up to take part in the run and ask others to sponsor them. In their fundraising efforts they can demonstrate that, while it is easy for us to access medical care – and we normally have lots of options – this is not the case for people in rural Afghanistan.

FUNDRAISING IDEAS



INSPIRATION – anything is possible! In 2017, one of our supporters walked 700 miles and raised more than £500 for BMS!

Afghan-style harvest supper

Invite your church to come together for a harvest supper in aid of *Life's First Cry* and the work of BMS worldwide. Show the video during the event and ask for donations, or set a price in advance and sell tickets.

In the mountains of Afghanistan, people sit on the floor and share food together out of large bowls, dipping a kind of naan into stew and eating with their right hands. It's a wonderful, communal experience, and a great way to share food together as a church family!

Spread large plastic sheets or tablecloths on the floor and get everyone to sit around them – men on one side of the room and women on the other. Before you eat, in the style of Afghan meals, someone should come around

the room with a jug of warm water, a large empty bowl and a bar of soap – pouring warm water over each person's hands (over the bowl) so they can be clean before eating.

In Afghanistan, the prayer is said after the meal is eaten – so when everyone has finished, ask someone to give thanks for the food, and for the people they're helping in Afghanistan.

End the evening by serving hot green tea and boiled sweets.

To be more authentic, you can find lots of simple Afghan recipes by searching online for 'Afghan meals' or 'Afghan stews'.

MENU IDEA:

- Naan (a traditional Afghan bread, eaten with most meals)
- Meat and potato stew (add cumin, saffron and turmeric)
- Vegetable dish (in honour of the fact that our work is helping dispel the incorrect belief that fruit and vegetables are unhealthy for pregnant women)
- Rice



A teddy-babies' picnic

Hold a bring-and-share picnic and get your church's children to bring their dolls. Ask people to bring along some food to share and a donation for *Life's First Cry* – we suggest £5 per person, £10 per family, £1 per doll.



YOUR CHURCH'S GIVING CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Many people in the UK choose to attend NCT antenatal classes when they're pregnant, to prepare for the birth of their baby. An average NCT course costs at least £160.

Why not ask your congregation whether any of them might consider setting aside the cost of part or all of an NCT course here in the UK to stand alongside pregnant women in Afghanistan, and share with them some of the helpful lessons that we get to learn here in the UK. By doing so, they can help save mothers' and babies' lives in Afghanistan – and help adults and children around the world experience fullness of life.