



# PRAYER RESOURCE

## CHRISTMAS 2018

**‘The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it.’ (John 1:5)**

**As we light our Advent candle each night**, we watch it slowly burn lower with anticipation for that moment when we celebrate that most spectacular of events: the moment when God became human and made his dwelling among us.

**The birth of Jesus is not the beginning of his story.** As we read in John’s Gospel, *‘in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.’* It is the poignant and powerful reminder that the triune God whispered, and light broke through the dark, formless void.

**This light is powerful. It is life-giving and life-sustaining.** This light sends the darkness cowering; it exposes the truth so corruption and evil cannot hide and it lights the path of justice, making clear God’s plan for his creation and his unrelenting love for his children. And God gives each of us a share in his light so that we might share it to all we meet so that, person by person, the darkness trembles as the light roars.

This short prayer resource is focused on the dark world of **child exploitation**, which Viva’s partner networks in both the UK and the Philippines are tackling head-on. It is a hard-hitting subject to think about at Christmas.

But, as we explore the darkness, remember it is always darkest before the dawn and, in Advent, **we wait for the dawn of God’s coming into the world.**

**OPENING PRAYER** Emmanuel, thank you that you are always with us and that you came and dwelt among us. Help us to take your light with us, to shine your truth, love and justice in the darkness, so that we might, with your help and guidance and power, transform this world, to the glory of your name. Amen.

*Please take time to reflect on the two prayer focus areas overleaf, either on your own, with family or friends or a church group. Suitable for anytime; not just for Christmas!*

# PRAYER FOCUS 1: IN THE UK

**‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’ (John 8: 12)**

**In 2017, the Internet Watch Foundation identified over 78,000 URLs containing child sexual abuse images.** Not only is online abuse of children prolific but it is on the increase. Children in the UK are victims, usually from adults, but also from peers.

We all have a duty to be internet-literate so that we can educate and empower our young people to use the internet wisely and safely.

This means having **open and honest conversations** with them, being aware of the tell-tale signs that they might be being groomed, and more generally **building their resilience** so they can withstand peer pressure and grooming.

**The biggest demand for the online sexual abuse of children comes from the West.** An estimated 80,000 UK nationals pose a threat to children through the web.

The National Crime Agency has warned that British paedophiles are seeking out victims in poor countries, including the Philippines, Kenya, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand.

They take advantage of sophisticated technology to hide their actions and incite abuse through live-streaming.

We have a responsibility in the the West to combat this, but we also need to **create a culture where abuse of children never even crosses a person’s mind.**

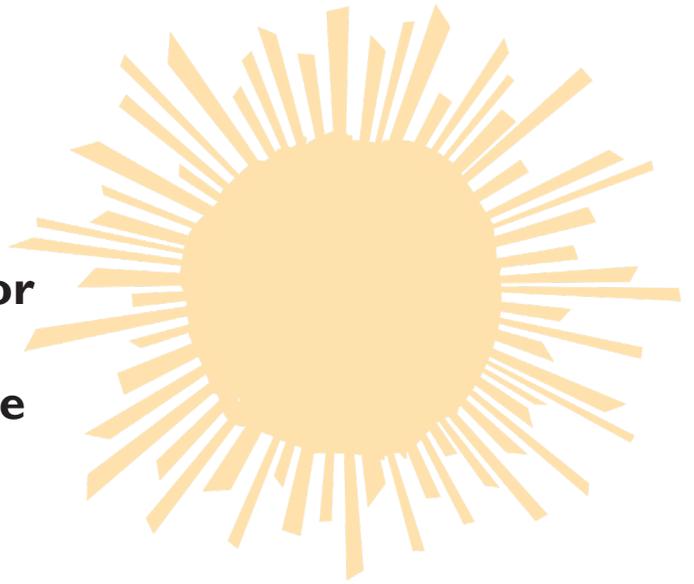
As Jesus says, *‘Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body is also full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body is also full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.’* (Luke 11: 34-35) Let’s be light, the light that is justice, the light that takes responsibility for the hurt our society causes, **the light that says that children deserve life.**

## **PRAY FOR:**

- The organisations in the West tackling online abuse.
- Childline, the NSPCC, and similar charities, working with children who have been victims of online abuse.
- Children and young people who are victims or are at risk.
- The Church to be a prophetic voice in speaking out against child abuse.
- Doorsteps, Viva’s network in the UK, as it builds the resilience of vulnerable young people.

**PRAYER** Lord God, help us to follow you and your example and the light you give us to protect life in this world. We grieve for all the children hurt and abused, especially when our society is so often the source of that injustice and abhorrent treatment. Give us the courage to play our part in putting a stop to the online abuse of children and the wisdom to know how to act. Amen.

# PRAYER FOCUS 2: IN THE PHILIPPINES



**‘The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.’ (Revelation 21:23)**

**The youngest victim that the International Justice Mission has rescued is three months old.**

UNICEF has named the Philippines the epicentre of the online sexual abuse trade, or OSEC with **more than 3,000 reports of possible cybersex trafficking cases a month**. Online sexual abuse has become a family business in some areas. That abuse of children as profitable is a damning indictment on society; desperate levels of poverty drive parents to have their children exploited for money.

**The glare from a computer screen can light a room, but it is a false light; one where the darkness is still in charge.** But the room, city or world lit by God is a transformed place where the darkness flees. It takes the smallest bit of God’s light to make a difference.

Viva’s partner network, **Philippine Children’s Ministries Network (PCMN)** is bringing God’s light to the murky world of the online sex trade.

One of its programmes seeks to eliminate OSEC with the three focus areas. **Prevention** is about raising awareness of the issue, **justice** is about improving reporting of abuse, and **restoration** is the essential work of reintegrating victims back into the community.

They are being God’s light: from the light that exposes the injustice to the light which shines God’s warm love upon his children.

**Even in the darkest night, God’s light still shines.** PCMN is taking seriously God’s call that we are to be salt and light, and with every child they reach to protect themselves, every abuser who is exposed, and every victim reintroduced to a safe community, that light spreads further and shines brighter.

## **PRAY FOR:**

- All victims of online child exploitation in the Philippines.
- PCMN and all of their projects.
- The Philippine police and justice system as they prosecute abusers.
- Joined-up working between local and global authorities in catching predators.
- God’s light to shine in the darkness.

**PRAYER** Almighty God, you are the God who sees and knows everything. Open our eyes so that we might not be blind to injustice. Be with those feeling so desperate they will resort to unimaginable decisions and guide them in the way of truth. Comfort all who have been hurt and empower those who bring your light to their darkness. Amen.

# A FINAL THOUGHT

**I don't imagine Bethlehem was ever the same since the night that Christ was born.**

The presence of angels leaves a heavenly light pollution in its wake, a lingering reminder that God is walking the earth.

As shepherds and kings and proud new parents kissed the face of God, they too, were filled with light, leaving a trail of it wherever they went. Christmas is the ultimate gift of God's light, let us be serious with that gift and leave a trace of it wherever we go.

**We are God's light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness shall not overcome it!**

## WHAT NEXT?

Thank you for using this resource to reflect and pray. Here are some suggestions about taking further action:

### GET MORE INFORMATION

Go to [www.viva.org/christmasappeal](http://www.viva.org/christmasappeal) for videos and articles.

**PRAY** Would you pray for Viva's work throughout the year? Sign up to receive our monthly prayer updates by emailing Vicki at [v.price@viva.org](mailto:v.price@viva.org)

**GIVE** Could you give to Viva's work to bring lasting change to children's lives? [www.viva.org/give](http://www.viva.org/give)

**GO** In 2019, we are launching a volunteer programme called Impact, with an opportunity to serve in the Philippines. Is this something for you or a friend? Email Vicki at [v.price@viva.org](mailto:v.price@viva.org) for more details.



**Words: Hannah Barr**