

Dear Friends,

The world has changed quickly since our last updates, and we need more than ever to uphold each other in prayer—we for you, as well as you for us! These are our current prayer priorities:

- 1. For continued protection of Nepal from a coronavirus outbreak.**
- 2. For UMN's hospitals as they prepare for an epidemic at a time of equipment scarcity and collapsing revenue.**
- 3. For patience and joy for our family during extended times of lockdown.**
- 4. For smooth government approvals for all of UMN's work.**



As we write, the government of Nepal has just announced that the national lockdown of the past week will be extended until 8 April. Like so many others in the UK and around the world, we're now largely confined to our flat, with brief, masked ventures out for dog-walking and collecting necessary groceries at the corner shop. The boys can play on the roof of the house, and we're getting a lot of use out of the new board games we picked up at Christmas.

We've a great deal to be personally grateful for. Fiona and the boys had stayed on in England in February after Joel's return to Nepal, and made it back into the country only three days before new visa restrictions would have made it impossible. We're so relieved to be going through this time together, on the same continent! We'd also picked up pretty much all the medical and grocery necessities for a lengthy lockdown the day before that was announced. And Joel's eyes and Fiona's migraines are both significantly improved; thanks as ever for your prayers for our health.

Unlike much of the rest of the world, Nepal has no actual epidemic to speak of—yet. The government locked down the country when only the second case was diagnosed. This was probably a wise decision, in a country with 28 million people, only 700 ICU beds, and next to no capacity (at present) for COVID-19 testing. Any outbreak would have a very high likelihood of getting out of control, overwhelming the health system, and costing hundreds of thousands of lives.

But coronavirus will devastate Nepal even if not one more person falls ill. Over one-third of the Nepali economy relies on either tourism or remittances from overseas workers; both have collapsed, and may not recover for many years. The many families who took on debt to send a member to work in Korea, Malaysia, or Qatar now can't pay off their loans. Lockdowns are causing job losses and business failures here as they do elsewhere, and hitting especially hard the many Nepalis who rely on a daily income in order to eat.

And the lockdowns are hurting some of the very hospitals on which Nepal would rely in an actual outbreak. United Mission to Nepal's two rural hospitals, in Tansen and Okhaldhunga, in a normal year may treat 150,000 patients. While our mission hospitals provide free care to anyone who can't afford it, most of those who come are able to pay for their care, and the hospitals depend on that patient revenue to cover most running costs.

Since the start of the coronavirus crisis, though, patient income has crashed by around 80%. Even if the lockdowns are eased for a while in April, many people will stay away from hospitals for fear of contagion. If UMN can't get funding to help with that revenue shock, the hospitals may not be able to pay all their staff—at exactly the time when we should be scaling up to face an epidemic!



Our hospitals also share the widespread global problem of not being able to get enough PPE (personal protective equipment) or N95 masks for frontline health workers. For this need, UMN already has the necessary funding, but is scouring Asia for a supplier willing and able to take our money. Please pray for the equipment to be found. And pray for our hospital team—for their resilience, for protection for their health, and for the Christian staff to keep their eyes on Jesus through what could be one of the most trying times in their lives.

These massive shocks have to some extent displaced the other important issues we've been asking you to pray for. But we're very mindful that all of UMN's agreements with the government are still due to expire this year. The present crisis could either lead to rapid approval (as officials recognise this is no time to hamper or delay a partner) or to delays due to all the relevant officials being completely consumed with coronavirus response. Let's please pray for the former!

The recruitment process for Joel's successor may start in June as planned, or it may end up having to be delayed, but regardless we'd be grateful for prayer on that key process for the mission's future.

So far, we are actually enjoying our time together as a family at home. But please pray for ongoing peace, joy, creativity, and patience for us as the weeks stretch on...

Please know that our prayers and concerns are also with you, our friends, family, and supporters around the world, as we go through this global pandemic together. God be with us all!

Joel and Fiona
Caleb and Isaac
United Mission to Nepal