

February 2014

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

--1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

*He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.
No sooner are they planted,
no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.*

--Isaiah 40: 23, 24

*The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever*

--Isaiah 40: 8

China—China Aid reports that house churches in China are continually being raided and some members are harassed and detained. Persecution ramped up particularly around the Christmas holiday, New Year's, and into January and was widespread, with incidents occurring in Guangdong, Sichuan, Anhui, and Shandong provinces. Among the many beaten and mistreated, one woman is reported dead after her chronic disease was gravely exacerbated by the abuse she experienced. In addition, a house church in Shandong is being evicted from their meeting place. Pray also for the house church in Nanle, Henan Province, where 12 members have been detained and beaten for months. Even recently, when their lawyers attempted to see them in prison, a mob surrounded the attorneys and three British reporters and began to assault them. Family members of the detained believers have also been harassed and beaten, and one prisoner even attempted suicide after being tortured. Pray for their faith, sustenance, and resilience. Give thanks that their lawyers were finally allowed to see two of the prisoners. Pray for the house church movement in China, as the believers there continue to experience persecution. Continue also to pray for Alim Yimiti, who has been detained since 2009, serving a 15-year sentence for his faith, and who recently has been struggling with illness. Pray for his wife Gulnur, too, as she struggles to care for their children and earn a livelihood, and has had additional difficulties with a business partner. Praise God for our brothers and sisters in China who endure hardship with courage and strength, and who continue to spread the light of the Gospel. (*Sources: China Aid Association; Open Doors*)

Nicaragua/Central America—Chronic kidney disease has become rampant among sugar-cane workers in Nicaragua and other countries in the region, with fatalities almost daily. This sweet resource, which is being consumed at increasing rates around the globe, comes with incredible costs to the people who labor to grow and harvest it. Grown in hot tropical climates, requiring excruciating manual labor, with working conditions that are brutal, and most often using toxic pesticides and chemicals, workers are literally dropping dead from the kidney disease that results from conditions. Further, Oxfam has reported that sugar cane fields are also a part of land grabs, where governments seize property from small landholders to give to large multinational corporations. And around the world, the sugar cane industry has also been guilty of child labor, such as in the Philippines, and there is also rampant use of forced labor or wages so low, they amount to slave labor. Pray for these workers

who literally bear in their bodies the cost of the food they produce, so that it can be bought cheaply around the world. Pray for families who lost loved ones and who live subsistence existences. Pray for governments and multinational corporations who create and profit from these conditions, that their consciences would be troubled and they would be motivated to enact more just working environments for their laborers. Pray for consumers around the globe to be informed and active voices for the voiceless, and use their economic power to support the fair-trade sugar industry. (*Sources: Oxfam; Global Exchange; The Guardian*)

Iran—Give thanks that the remaining two prisoners of four detained during the raid on the Assemblies of God Church in Ahaz were freed. In December, Farhad and Naser were released, while Farhad's wife, Shahnaz, and another believer, Davoud, remained imprisoned. However, this past January, Shahnaz and Davoud were also freed. All had originally been given one-year sentences for “converting to Christianity, inviting Muslims to convert, and propagating against the Islamic regime through promoting Evangelical Christianity.” Despite this good news of these releases, the church in Ahaz has been closed—even though it is officially recognized by the state—and Pastor Farhad is still banned from engaging in Christian or pastoral activities. Increased pressure and surveillance has been experienced in recent months by many state-recognized denominations, with the closing of churches and banning of Farsi-language services being common. Pray for these four believers as they transition back to their lives at home, that they would feel Christ's presence and feel comforted and emboldened by it. Pray that the Church in Iran would be discerning of the Spirit's guidance and that at least the recognized denominations would be able to continue their worship and teaching. Pray for leaders and officials in Iran, that they might love mercy and act justly and come to know the light of Christ. (*Source: Middle East Concern*)

Central African Republic—After 10 months of persecution and abuse at the hands of the Muslim Seleka militia, Christian militias are retaliating with similar atrocities. In March of 2013, Seleka, comprised primarily of fighters from Chad and Sudan, ousted President Françoise Bozize, and then waged a campaign of terror on the Christian population. After the intervention of French and African troops, Seleka was largely disarmed. However, rather than the hoped-for peace, new waves of violence erupted at the hands of the pro-Bozize Christian militia. Violence on both sides has reached horrific proportions, with children being especially targeted, including beheadings. Now 20 percent of the country's population has been displaced, around 1 million people, and churches and seminaries are overrun as they try to offer shelter to those fleeing the hostilities. Pray for the love of Christ and a miraculous spirit of forgiveness to pervade this horrific situation. Pray especially that Christians would reflect Jesus in this situation, that they would overcome evil with good, that Christian leaders would be bold and effective in directing their community toward reconciliation with their neighbors. Pray that God would comfort all who mourn on both sides of the conflict and replace fear with His perfect peace. (*Sources: International Christian Concern; BBC*)

Yemen—The country of Yemen is at a crucial juncture, as they contemplate once again outlawing the common practice of child brides and setting a legal minimum age limit of 18 for marriage. Though the practice has been a subject of controversy for years, progress has been thwarted and complicated as Yemen also suffers from endemic poverty and poor families are induced to sell their young daughters to much older men. Further, this deeply conservative Islamic country sees the setting of a legal age limit as in violation of Sharia law. However, the recent cases of an 8-year-old named Rawan, who died of injuries sustained on her “wedding night” to a man in his forties, and of another 12-year-old, who bled to death 3 days after her wedding, also to a much older man, has raised this issue again within Yemen and around the world with an added sense of urgency. Other girls have committed suicide to escape the abuse, and some have died in childbirth as they are too young to sustain a pregnancy and safe delivery.

In a country where approximately half the girls are married before they are 18, and often into situations that amount to modern-day slavery, pray for the thousands of girls suffering in these circumstances. Pray for the population of Yemen to finally come to grips with the wrongness of this practice and take the opportunity of the redrafting of the constitution to enact legislation to protect Yemeni girls. Pray for economic development that will alleviate the underlying poverty and other causes that perpetuate this practice. Give thanks for Hooria Mashhour, Yemeni minister of human rights, and other outspoken advocates who have worked diligently to combat this abuse, including the recent intervention of authorities in November to stop the wedding of a 9-year-old girl. Pray for the light of Christ to pervade this place. (*Sources: CNN; BBC*)

Bangladesh—Please pray for healing and comfort for six Christians and two Muslims who are hospitalized in Bangladesh. On January 7, four Muslim extremists attacked the six believers at home in Bagra Gram. When two Muslim neighbors came to protect and help them, they were attacked by the extremists as well. Praise God for these neighbors who tried to assist them. Pray for conviction and salvation for the attackers. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

Syria—As the ongoing crisis in Syria continues to destroy homes, lives, and displace millions, the Syrian refugees within the country and those fleeing to Jordan and Lebanon are now experiencing another dimension of suffering as the struggle to stay warm during brutal winter weather. Despite the best efforts of relief organizations, all refugee camps are grossly under supplied. With only tarp tents to shield against wind and snow, there also are not enough blankets, warm clothing, fuel, and food. Families have indicated their fears that they will not survive, and newborn babies are especially vulnerable. Pray for God's provision for these suffering millions. Pray for the work of relief organizations that they will be enabled to be efficient and effective in bringing aid to the camps. Pray for comfort and sustenance of those languishing under these devastating and extreme conditions. (*Sources: World Vision; Oxfam*)

Nepal—Please pray for comfort and help for the believers in Nepal, as they have recently experienced great hardship. Last October, a church leader named Mr. Debelal was beaten to death, and on December 23, four homes and a local church were burned to the ground. While violence against Christians has not been extremely common in Nepal, the government has been lax in its response to the incident. Pray for Ganga Lama Tamang, Lama Bahadur Tamang, Lama Bokta and Bikram Lama who all lost their homes in the attack, that they might experience the provision of God and the forgiving Spirit of Christ. The attacks are believed to be perpetrated by Hindu extremists. Pray for these extremists to turn to the Lord. Give thanks for many locals who tried to intervene and stop the attacks. Pray that Nepalese officials might provide justice, and all involved might encounter Christ through this situation. (*Sources: Christian Today*)

Laos—To become a Christian in Laos, a primarily Buddhist nation, is to face discrimination and abuse. For women, who are seen in Laotian culture and society as inferior to men, the consequences for following Christ can be much more severe, especially in rural areas. They can lose their property, be rejected and ostracized from their families, and beaten by their husbands. Because of endemic poverty, women in particular are required to work all week, around the clock, and church activities are seen as a waste of time and resources. Many women are forbidden from attending church, others are reported to the police by their own husbands when a pastor even visits them at home. Many of the women who are newer believers experience pressure to maintain certain cultural practices, and often themselves find it hard to completely relinquish former practices, such as consulting witch doctors and shamans. Pray that these women would find strength in Christ. Pray that they would experience deep and full self-worth in Him. Pray for husbands and families to be loving and merciful, and most of all, that they would find

Christ through the compelling witness of the changed lives of their wives, daughters, and mothers.
(Source: *Open Doors*)

Ukraine—The political situation in Ukraine has become increasingly tense and violent, as peaceful protest has been met with violent repression and opposition activist have faced abduction, barbaric torture, and even death as a result of calling for a just and democratic society. Pray especially for the physical and emotional healing of Dmitrii Bulatov, a main organizer of the protest movement, who was abducted on 22 January, was blindfolded, beaten, tortured, and even crucified during the eight days of his “disappearance,” after which he was dumped from a car in the middle of a forest, left to freeze to death. Miraculously, he managed to stagger to a nearby house and get help. Fellow activist Yury Verbytsky did not survive a similar ordeal. Pray for the country of Ukraine, that peace and justice might win out, that corruption and repression would be replaced by a fair and equitable society, and that those who have perpetrated barbaric and murderous violence would be held accountable for their crimes. Pray for the protection of those who are speaking out for justice. And pray that all, from citizens to government officials to those who commit acts of violence, would find ultimate freedom and justice in Christ. (Sources: *Amnesty International*; *The Economist*)