

May 2017 Prayer Items

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

--Isaiah 58: 6-10

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

--1 John 5: 14-15

Turkmenistan—Like Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan routinely forces their population to work in the cotton harvest under bad conditions and without pay, including all kinds of professionals, the elderly, and children. Gaspar Matalaev, a young reporter, has worked tirelessly and undercover to document and expose these abuses, and for this he was arrested and tortured—including the use of electric currents—into confessing to minor fraud charges. His family has been promised his release numerous times, but Gaspar continues to languish in jail. He has been there since October 4, 2016, two days after the posting of his report on state-orchestrated forced labor was posted on the Alternative Turkmenistan News website, the news agency for which he works. Pray for his safety, sustenance, and for his freedom. Pray that his work might be blessed to bring about real change in this nation. Pray for Turkmenistan as a whole—one of the most authoritarian countries in the world—that the government might pursue a course of integrity and justice and upholding the rights of its whole population. Pray that this atrocious practice of slave/child labor would cease in Turkmenistan and around the globe, and that many, despite and even through these horrific trials, might find Christ, the One who came to set the captive free. (*Source: International Labor Rights Forum*)

International—A few facts that should trouble the average clothing consumer in the developed world: 80 billion garments made each year; 2 million tons of garments end up in the landfill each year; 11,000-20,000 liters of water is used to produce enough cotton for one pair of jeans; the owner of Zara was listed as the 3rd richest man in the world, CEO of H & M owns a whole village in the UK; 20 million dollars of this ready-made fashion is produced in Bangladesh, the industry accounts for 80 percent of the country's GDP, over 5,000 factories but only 200 inspectors, and on April 24, 2013, it was the site of one of the worst factory disasters in history. Add to all that the 1.5 million children estimated to work in state-sponsored child/slave labor for

Uzbekistan's cotton industry, and you begin to get a glimpse of the human, environmental, and economic costs of our disposable fashion industry. Clothing has never been cheaper, and yet, it is produced from start to finish by people literally working as slaves or in slave-like and dangerous conditions, all to keep the profits high, and the costs low. Pray for increased awareness of this issue and for consumers to use their buying power for the best good they are able. Pray for more and better options to support ethical commerce. And pray for the consciences of all who are in power in this industry—from CEOs to factory supervisors—to be pricked and convicted, leading to real, systemic change, so that all will no longer be guilty of the charge leveled in Isaiah 58 that even as we “fast” we still “exploit the worker.” (Source: Lucy Siegle’s *TEDxSalford Talk*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YglyHzvBqpA>; See also her book, *To Die for: Is Fashion Wearing out Our World?*)

Tunisia—Tunisia sparked hope and promise as the beginning of the Arab Spring. Though that moment in history spiraled into devastating crises around the region, Tunisia once again could offer hope for reconciliation and change through hearings for Truth and Dignity, acknowledging and documenting decades of horrific torture, abuse, and oppression. This is a crucial time to pray for peace, healing, and transformation in this country that might lead to hope for other countries in conflict in the region. Pray for the tens of thousands of victims of systemic torture and unlawful detention that this process might be used to help heal them, and even lead them to forgiveness. Pray for those who participated in these abuses that they might find the peace of acknowledging their wrongdoing. Pray that this process will lead to unity and freedom in this country, rather than deeper divisions, as it has threatened to do. Pray that all involved will find ultimate healing, peace, and salvation in Christ. (Source: *The New York Times*)

China—April 2017 proved to be another disheartening month for human rights and religious freedom in China, as five Christians from Xinjiang province were sentenced to 3-5 years of prison for merely planning Bible studies. This happened amid an increased persecution of ethnic Uyghur Muslims also in Xinjiang province. At least 39 Uyghur Muslims were detained for “illegal religious activities,” consisting of meeting with “unsanctioned” imams. Four of those detained were such imams and have been sent away for “political re-education.” The rest remain in prison. Other measures taken by Chinese authorities targeted toward Uyghur Muslims is to ban certain names, such as “Saddam” or “Medina”—seen as “radical” names—as well as instituting restrictions on “abnormal” beards or veils. The recent annual report by US Commission on International Religious Freedom documents a continued decline in human rights and religious freedom in China, as authorities continue to target “anyone considered a threat to the state, including religious believers, human rights lawyers, and other members of civil society.” The Commission also recommended that China be designated a “country of particular concern” under the United States’ International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Pray for the protection and sustenance of those being particularly targeted for harassment, repression, abuse, and detention by the Chinese government. Pray earnestly for those in authority in China to begin to rule with integrity and justice instead of out of fear. Pray for the increase of religious freedoms, and for the growth of the Church, regardless of a change in governmental policy. (Source: *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Brazil—The Religious Liberty Partnership, comprised of over 60 organizations from 25 countries meeting for 11 years, held its annual consultation meeting in Brazil this April, the first held in Latin America. Part of the reason for the choice of Brazil was the incredibly low incidence of religious persecution and/or repression in this country, as documented by a recent Pew Research report. Joining together to learn from the work being done in Brazil and to celebrate its success, Christian leaders from around the world came together to collaboratively address issues of international religious liberties, which are not so well protected in other countries, including other Latin American nations, such as Cuba, Mexico, and Colombia. Praise God that this was a productive meeting marked by mutual support and collaboration. As expressed by Godfrey Yogarjah, Deputy Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance, “It was amazing to sense God’s presence, the moving of His spirit, the oneness of mind, and the resolve to collaborate and work together. I have no doubt that this partnership comprising CEOs of over 60 organizations from 25 nations—each committed to advancing freedom of religion and belief—is only possible because God brought it together.” Give thanks for these committed Christian leaders devoting lives of ministry to the care and protection of other believers everywhere. Pray for God’s blessing on their work and for the broader collaboration and support of the Church around the world through prayer, active engagement with the issues, and financial contributions for this good work. (Source: *The Jubilee Campaign*)

India-- As a group of believers gathered to pray in a rented house in Kondhapally, a mob of 70 attackers barged into the building with kerosene in order to burn Bibles and property and violently attacked men, women and children. Pastor Basanna, who was beaten along with his wife, says that they have been persecuted before, but the violence is increasing. He insists that he will not leave this village, even if it costs him his life. When members of the church tried to file a complaint at the police station, the police instead blamed them and refused to allow them to continue meeting at the rented house. Please pray for protection for the pastor and his church as they continue to receive threats from radical groups. Pray also for the community members, both authorities and villagers, that have witnessed this persecution but have not stepped in to help. Pray that God would use this as a witness to unbelievers, and that the lost would find Christ. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

Malaysia-- Pastor Raymond Koh has been missing since February, and was presumably abducted after being forced out of his car while leaving a highway. He had received threats from jihadists for his mission work in the past and for complaints of proselytizing. Pastor Koh runs an outreach that helps the poor, single mothers, and drug addicts. Please pray for his protection and safe return and for his wife Susanna and son Jonathan as they anxiously await news of him. (Source: *BBC News*)

Mexico-- In small villages in the Tuxban and Bulano regions, roughly 25 converts to Christianity are experiencing alienation and persecution since leaving their ritualistic tribal beliefs. Most of the community is part of the Wixárika tribe who participate in pagan rituals using a hallucinogenic drug and sacrifices offered to their gods. Christians are reaching out to those in

their community despite the alienation. Please pray that these Wixárika Christians would faithfully share the Gospel and love their neighbors, and pray that the hearts of the lost would be softened to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ. Pray that they would turn from false gods and idolatry and see that only Christ can save them. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs, Canada*)

Burma-- When U Win Tin, who spent close to 20 years in prison as a prisoner of conscience, was released, he chose to wear a blue shirt that was similar to what he had worn in jail, until all political prisoners in Burma were released. This year, on the anniversary of Tin's death, April 21st, people around the world wore blue clothing to continue the call for the release of political prisoners. They are peacefully demanding that anyone imprisoned for religious, political, or arbitrary motives be released. They also are requiring a prison review process to ensure that future inmates are not wrongfully detained. Please pray that these voices would be heard, that this movement by 22 organizations would be effective, and that Burma would make great strides in enforcing basic human rights. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Uganda-- A Muslim extremist group recently came onto Pastor Kalaja's property in Nakabale Village to cut down his trees and tear down the church that is being built on his land. This group is also responsible for killing his mother at an earlier time. When he went to the police to file a complaint, the group threatened that they would kill him. Please pray for Pastor Kalaja's safety and the ongoing ministry of his church. Pray for the eighty or so members to find a safe place to meet for worship. Pray especially for this extremist group (which includes the pastor's own cousin) to be convicted of their grave sin and turn to Christ for forgiveness and salvation. Pray that they would turn from their wickedness and live peaceably with the Christians in their community. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)