

May 2020 Prayer Items

Who will rise up for me against the wicked?

Who will take a stand for me against evildoers?

Unless the LORD had given me help,

I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death.

When I said, “My foot is slipping,”

your unfailing love, LORD, supported me.

When anxiety was great within me,

your consolation brought me joy.

—Psalm 94: 16-19

International—The annual report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) just added five more countries to its long-standing list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs), which calls out individual countries for oppression of their citizens on the basis of religion and which the allows the United States to implement a set of sanctions against said countries should an administration choose to do so. In addition to Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, which have been on this list for years, the USCIRF has now included India, Nigeria, Russia, Syria, and Vietnam. The report cites violations such as the routine detention and fining of Muslims, Scientologists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia; the refusal of citizenship in Vietnam to Hmong and Montagnard Christians; the complete governmental inaction in the face of escalating crimes, violence, and discrimination against Christians in India, and the denial of citizenship to Muslims there, leaving them also vulnerable to continued harassment and discrimination. Pray for each of these countries—the original nine, as well as the additional five. Give thanks for the recognition by the USCIRF of these situations of human rights abuses and attacks on religious freedom, and for the action taken to promote justice. Pray that justice and freedom from persecution would follow, but more so, that the witness of believers in these countries would be strong, courageous, faithful, and that many would come to Christ because of them. Pray for the United States and other countries in the West to pursue integrity and justice not only in words but in deeds as well. (*Source: Jubilee Campaign*)

Nigeria—Nigerians are facing even more escalating violence, and they are responding in God’s grace and faith. Prior to Rev Lawan Andimi’s execution by Boko Haram, he sent a video to his family and church, telling them to not worry if he is killed but to thank God for everything. After Rev Andimi’s beheading, his wife said, “Our faith is now even stronger than at any other time...I know my husband to be a great man of faith; I was sure after seeing the video that even if he died in the hands of his captors, it would not be a loss because he knew where he was going. I was strengthened by my husband’s message in the video; he spoke like a man of faith, a man who was already prepared to meet with the Lord.’ Similarly, when 22-year-old Ropvil Daciya Dalep was shot to death on video to “avenge blood shed by Christians,” his father said, “If you kill a Christian you only killed the flesh because we shall rejoice again on the day of resurrection.” With hurting hearts, we can praise God for His victory while we pray for His comfort and gentle healing for these families. Let us pray also for His protection over Christians in Nigeria. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

China—After five years of unjust imprisonment, human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang was finally released last month, only to be forced to return to his childhood city, rather than Beijing, where he would have been reunited with his wife and young son. This was clearly a calculated move to further punish this man who has courageously advocated for a freer and more just society in China, as his wife and child have also been prevented from joining him Jinan, where he was forced to relocate. Though he was among a much larger group of human rights lawyers detained in 2015, he speculated that he was held the longest due to his refusal to “confess” to trumped up charges—a suspicion confirmed by the ongoing harassment and punishment of his family even upon his release. The United States government has condemned this action, as has Human Rights Watch and other NGOs. Pray that this family will be reunited, as we give thanks for those who speak up for truth and justice under incredibly challenging circumstances. (*Source: The Guardian*)

Egypt—Please pray for the protection and safe return home for Rania Abd al-Meseh, a Christian Egyptian woman, who was recently kidnapped. A video was sent of her saying that she is converting to Islam, but she appears to be under stress in the filming. Rania is an outspoken Christian, so it seems unusual that she would willingly convert to Islam. Please pray for Rania, who surely must be experiencing persecution from her captors. She is a mother to three daughters, so pray also for comfort and peace for them, and for her as she is separated from her family. Sadly, it is common for Christian women to be kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam, so pray for the Muslim world as a whole to cease this wicked practice. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

Yemen—Conflict has raged in Yemen for five years, in some ways a proxy conflict between Syria and Iran, subjecting an innocent population to unimaginable suffering. It has left 18 million people without access to clean water or sanitation, over half the population facing severe food shortages, and huge challenges for the humanitarian organizations willing to aid them. And now COVID-19. The total decimation of civil society and basic infrastructure in this country has left Yemenis massively vulnerable to this deadly pandemic—especially the millions displaced and cramped into camps and makeshift shelters. Pray for the tenuous ceasefire, established in April in light of the corona virus, to remain firm and possibly lead to long-standing peace. Pray for provision and protection for the suffering in Yemen, especially women and children who once again are most at risk. Pray for the God of Peace to bring His grace, justice, love, and salvation to Yemen. (*Sources: International Rescue Committee; Reuters; Action Against Hunger*)

Laos—This winter, the members and leader of a village in Northern Laos destroyed the homes of three Christian families because they converted to Christianity from their tribal religion. The families fled to a field and set up make-shift homes, but those were also destroyed. The families moved into another village, only to be told to move on so that they don't "anger the spirits" of that place. Thankfully, a Christian from another town invited them to stay in his house for a low, affordable rent, and the local church has helped them with necessities. Praise God that He has sustained these families in their distress and has provided a safe shelter for them. Pray that while they are thus persecuted their faith would remain strong and their witness would be used for God's glory and to bring others to faith. (*Source: Open Doors*)

Israel—Messianic Jews in Israel face harassment and persecution from ultra-Orthodox factions on a regular basis. Extremist Jews will often stand outside Messianic Jewish gatherings to curse and insult those going in. In recent months in the city of Arad, meeting places had been scouted out by ultra-Orthodox men, vehicle license plates noted, and even the insides of meeting places had been photographed, which was threatening and ominous. In general, Christians in the region are considered of low social standing by both Jewish and Muslim populations, have very few job prospects or hopes of advancement, and often suffer shunning from their communities. However, we praise God that a recent gathering of radical ultra-Orthodox Jews outside of a Messianic Jewish meeting was much more peaceful, and those protesting it only tried to dissuade people from attending. Pray for the continued sustenance of believers in Israel, for provision for their material needs, and for comfort, courage, and faithfulness as they follow Christ. Pray for the many around them who need to know their Messiah. (*Source: The Voice of the Martyrs*)

Mexico—Communities in Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo and Oaxaca states have been denying certain indigenous religious groups access to water. This is especially alarming during the Covid crisis when regular access to washing is so crucial. In addition, some are receiving fines and threats, their children are denied access to school, and some Catholic and Protestant leaders have been attacked. Mervyn Thomas from CSW says: "The situation for all religious minority communities and religious leaders in Mexico remains a cause for concern. It is exacerbated by government inaction, or inadequate action, which has entrenched impunity. Beyond intermittent verbal condemnations, little has been done to address violence and violations against religious minority communities and religious leaders." Please pray for protection in this seemingly Christian nation which is experiencing unexpected persecution. (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Iraq/Syria—After ISIS destroyed Christian communities in both Iraq and Syria in 2014, driving believers out of their country, these same brothers and sisters are now trickling back in to rebuild their homes and churches. Please pray fervently that the church and its ministries can be reestablished in these broken-down, burnt, and

demolished areas. Praise God for the believers' faith and determination. Pray that their work would not be impeded and that they would not lose heart. As when the Israelites with Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt the wall and the temple in Israel, pray that those in the Middle East will be blessed with God's protection from their enemies as they rebuild together in unity. Pray that they would be salt and light in that dark place. (*Source: Open Doors*)

International—From the workers who pick the cotton to the seamstresses who sew the clothes, laborers in for the international fashion industry are victims of unlivable wages, unreasonably long work hours, and poor working conditions. Almost all are caught in endemic cycles of extreme poverty, some are victims of forced labor and human trafficking. All this despite the fact that the profits from the clothing industry registers in the *hundreds of billions* of dollars. Often governments are complicit in the exploitation of a mostly female workforce—certainly all consumers are, even if inadvertently. Pray for justice for the exploited and vulnerable. Give thanks for the tireless efforts of numerous labor and human rights advocates who have shed light on these atrocities and for the progress that has been made in the industry. Give thanks to the God of justice, Father to the widow, orphan, and alien that numerous companies—such as Hanes Brands (that include Champion, Jockey, and Playtex), H & M, Target, and New Balance have taken significant measures to improve the lives and rights of their workers all along the supply chain, and that companies like Outland Denim, Etiko, and Patagonia have achieved an almost perfect standard of ethical corporate conduct. Pray for an international purchasing population to grow mindful and compassionate to the impact our consumption has on others and ourselves. Pray that God would protect the vulnerable and convict the indifferent. (“*2019 Ethical Fashion Report*,” *Baptist World Aid, Australia*)