

May 2024 Prayer

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.*

—Isaiah 61:1

Sudan—Since fighting broke out a year ago, civilians have suffered the most. An estimated 25 million people are in critical need of humanitarian aid now. Christians have been particularly targeted, and many of their churches have been burned to the ground. However, praise God that they are still keeping their eyes on Jesus. Reverend Yahia Nalu shares, “All they did was destroy the building, not the church.” He requests prayers “for the little remaining servants of the Lord in Sudan.” He continues, “Please pray to the Lord to give them strength and put food on their tables as they have no income or savings. We finally request prayers for rebuilding these destroyed and burned churches.” (*Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Russia/India—The extreme poverty of many in East Asia causes individuals to seek employment in Europe and the Middle East in an attempt to support their families from abroad. However, this leaves many vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation—the most recent of which is a scheme where Indian men like David Moothappan respond to ads from employment agencies posting for jobs as security guards in Russia making 200,000 rupees (\$2,402) a month. Sadly, when these men arrive at what they believe to be jobs as a security guard, they are given a soldier’s uniform and forced to fight on the frontline of the conflict with Ukraine. According to Freedom United: “When Mr. Moothappan initially arrived in Moscow, he and his friends were all made to sign a contract in Russian, a language none of them could read. Recruits from Sri Lanka joined them, and they were all taken to a military camp in the Rostov region bordering Ukraine. It was here that Russian officers took their passports and mobile phones, even their families didn’t know where they were or what their situation was.” A few, like David Moothappan, have managed to escape, and now India’s foreign ministry is exerting pressure on the Russian government help locate and return home all Indian nationals who have been deceived through this scheme, though many remain missing. Pray for their protection and safe return. Pray that those who organize these horrible, illegal schemes would be thwarted and that governments would act with integrity and diligence to restore vulnerable people to their families and be vigilant against further exploitation. Pray for social and economic change to bring about opportunity and sustainable ways to support families without taking on risky employments far from home. Pray that those who have much would act with justice and integrity towards those who have so little. Pray that God would use even these horrible experiences to draw many close to Him. (*Sources: BBC; Freedom United*)

Myanmar—Hkalam Samson, a Baptist minister who had spoken at the White House about the human rights abuses in his country of Myanmar, was released on a Wednesday afternoon in April only to be rearrested Wednesday evening. Although a prominent and outspoken human rights advocate, he was released as part of a New Year celebration, when many political prisoners were freed from prison. Authorities arrived at his house late that night to ask him, his wife, and another church member some questions, and they were taken to prison. Pray that he, his wife, and his friend would be strengthened, protected, comforted, and encouraged by the Lord, and that he would miraculously be full of hope in Christ. Pray for justice in this case and that he would still be able to be a light behind bars. (*Source: ABC News*)

Iran—Christian convert Shabeddin (Shahab) Shahi was first imprisoned in 2019 for four months on charges of propaganda against the state. Arrested again in December 2023, he was then notified on March 11 of this year that he had 5 days to again present himself to court on propaganda charges. He did appear court and now awaits a second hearing at 6th Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Karaj to face charges of propaganda against the Islamic regime. We join Middle East Concern and other believers in Iran, praying: “Shahab will be strengthened and encouraged while he waits with patience and that he will be acquitted of the charges; and the Iranian authorities will stop violating the right to express one’s religious beliefs, including by converts to Christianity.” (Source: *Middle East Concern*)

Democratic Republic of Congo—There have been many attacks in the DRC, causing the people there to live in constant fear. Those who refuse to convert to Islam are often persecuted. The ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) takes many citizens captive after attacking them. Pray for safety for the people in Congo. Pray they would cling to the Lord in these terrible trials and know their help comes from Him. Pray for a miracle, that the ADF would stop targeting this area and their threats and attacks would end. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

Mexico—Hidalgo state has some of the highest rates in Mexico of discrimination and human rights abuses connected to religious persecution—often from indigenous communities who do not welcome Christian believers or converts. Despite this, the governor and state government have historically denied any presence of faith-based discrimination or attacks. Most recently in the villages of Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, 139 Christians were forced to flee their homes after village leaders had the electricity to their homes cut off. All who fled were members of the Great Commission Baptist Church, and the church building along with some members’ homes were vandalized. Access to the church was blocked, and guards were placed at the entrances to the villages to intimidate believers as well. Among the 139 displaced Christians, 70 were children under the age of 17 and five were infants. In March 2024, the pastor of the church, Rogelio Hernández Baltazar, was arbitrarily detained for 48 hours along with other leaders of the church. In early April, village leaders sanctioned the takeover of five plots of land belonging to members of the church, cutting down trees, removing stones, and destroying their crops. The Christian villagers are now seeking sanctuary in Huejutla de los Reyes, being assisted by local Protestant churches there, as they petition the government to take action to restore them to their homes, protect their rights, and allow them to worship freely. Pray that leaders in the region, especially the new governor, will take effective and meaningful action to stop this persecution. Pray that the indigenous villagers will not see Christian neighbors as a threat and will cease in these attacks. Pray for the protection of the lives, livelihoods, homes, and possessions of the displaced believers. Pray that God would continue to provide for all their needs, strengthen their faith, and give them His peace. (Source: *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

North Korea—Please pray for the persecuted Christians who are struggling to survive. Many thousands of citizens are arrested and thrown into prison camps for showing the smallest bit of suspicious behavior. Reports from camps tell how mothers have been forced to kill their own babies, and most are starving to death. Believers often have to hide their faith even from their own families. Pray for strength for the struggling, and that they would have grace and protection. Also pray for the wicked that are in authority and the guards, that their hearts would be softened and they would have mercy. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

Ghana—In 1965 when the Akosombo Dam was completed in Ghana, Lake Volta—the most expansive artificial reservoir in the world was created and entire forests were swallowed up beneath the water. The economy shifted from farming to fishing, yet the body of water presented a unique challenge. The vast network of submerged trees meant nets continuously getting tangled. This gave rise to a whole

other—entirely evil—new practice. Traffickers began deceiving poor families in the region to send their very young boys to work in the fishing industry, mostly diving into the deep, dark water to untangle nets. Promised short hours and educations, the reality was actually dangerous work, sunrise until after sundown, under brutal conditions with barely even enough food to survive. As *Christianity Today* states, “Some are beaten. Some drown. All face hunger, abuse, trauma, and the desperation of slavery.” Praise God that International Justice Mission has been working rescue operations in the region since 2015, along with educating law enforcement and local officials, and prosecuting traffickers. In six years following the first rescue, IJM reports, “IJM in Ghana now has a staff of 23 people. IJM in Ghana has trained 19,000 government employees, made 189 arrests, won 38 convictions, and rescued more than 300 children.” Yet the work continues with challenges as traffickers adjust, finding more remote areas of the 3,000 miles of shoreline. Marine police are threatened with violence and still have not boats of their own. While we praise God for the more than 300 children rescued, we continue to pray for the safety and deliverance of the thousands of children still missing. Pray that God would bless and uphold the efforts of IJM and other advocates for child slaves. Pray for the healing and restoration of those rescued. Pray that the Ghanaian government would continue to partner with IJM and others to work in earnest to stop this illegal, brutal practice. (Source: *Christianity Today*; IJM)

Egypt—In Upper Egypt, after hearing rumors that the Christian community was planning to build a church, extremists set fire to several Christian homes. The fire department reacted quickly to contain the fires, and police are investigating to find the perpetrators. Praise God that the authorities are not ignoring the plight of the Christians there, and pray that those who instigated these crimes would be prevented from attacking further. Pray that the believing community in Egypt would be one and stand strong in their faith. Pray that they might be a light to the lost around them and point many to Christ. (Source: *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Nepal—Pray for brothers Pastor Pramod and Pastor Dilip, evangelists in Nepal, who were threatened with physical violence when Hindu radicals in the region where Pramod and Dilip work became aware that one of the 17 churches they lead was starting a building. Radicals attacked the church and destroyed its foundation. While Nepal is a predominantly Hindu country (81 percent), Christians in the region face persecution from Buddhists, Muslims, Marxist groups, and the government who have criminalized conversion to other religions. Pray for the protection of Pastor Pramod and Pastor Dilip, the 17 congregations they serve, and all believers in Nepal. Pray for courage to be a bold witnesses for Jesus, for them to be comforted and encouraged. Pray that those who persecute Christians and other minorities that they might repent of their actions and come to know the salvation of Christ. (Source: *Voice of the Martyrs*)