

January 2018 Prayer Items

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

—Psalm 90:12

The eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.

—Psalm 33:18

Uzbekistan—For believers in Uzbekistan, even having a Bible in your home can be dangerous. Such was the case for Irina Stepanova on November 10, 2017, when under the pretense of looking for illegal guns, police raided her home in Andijan in eastern Uzbekistan. What they did find and confiscate were numerous Christian magazines and booklets, Christian CDs and DVDs, a Baptist songbook, personal poems by Irina, and of course, Bibles. As a result, Irina was charged with “illegal storage and import of religious materials with the intent to distribute.” Pray that despite this invasive violation and clearly unjust charges, Irina would remain strong in her commitment to Christ and demonstrate a spirit of love and peace to those who are persecuting her. Pray that those in her Baptist church might be emboldened by her witness, and pray that many around her, such as the police and government officials might be transformed themselves by her witness and choose to follow Jesus. (*Source: The Voice of the Martyrs*)

India-- Hindu radicals have recently increased persecution toward Christians in India. Pastor Sebas was attacked in December in Telangana, India while leaving a meeting at his rural church. Nine men beat him with sticks until he lost consciousness. A bus driver found him and brought him to a hospital where he was treated for his severe injuries. He now suffers from paralysis in his face, and partial hearing and vision loss. Please pray for the safety of Pastor Sebas and his church members who are still committed to sharing the Gospel despite the risks. Please pray also for all the other Christians in India who are often brutally persecuted because of their faith. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

Syria—Imagine having cancer, or kidney disease, or diabetes. Now imagine having those conditions—or any other life-threatening disease—in the midst of war, without access to chemotherapy, dialysis, insulin, or even a specialist who can best treat that disease. Violent conflict always disrupts the provision of daily needs, from food supplies to medical care.

However, the general population in the Syrian conflict is facing a deadly humanitarian catastrophe as all sides have resorted to targeting medical centers and hospitals as part of their strategy. Sadly, the Syrian government and their Russian allies are most often found to be responsible for these particular atrocities--even over and above ISIS and other rebel groups. Thousands have died just from untreated illnesses, children have died of fever, and doctors and nurses have been killed in the conflict. One hospital is operating in a cave 17 meters under the ground in rural Hama, and many other hospitals have been rebuilt, repaired, and/or relocated numerous times. Pray for the protection of those suffering in these conditions, the protection and provision of doctors and skilled professionals to help those who are ill or wounded. Pray that the warring sides of this conflict would stop violating the rules warfare and stop targeting civilians and the resources that protect them. Pray for the miraculous provision of necessities for the vulnerable population. *(Source: Reuters)*

Uganda—Following Christ has cost Muslim-background believer, Leticia, dearly. After sharing with her family about her faith in Christ, she was thrown out, and her father cursed her and disowned her. However, worse than all of this, her family is refusing to allow Leticia to take her 4-year-old daughter with her, because they know Leticia will take her daughter to church. Despite the great comfort she receives from her church family and her service at church as an usher, the separation from her child is a crushing blow. Pray that Leticia would find comfort and “peace that transcends understanding” from her Heavenly Father in light of the utter rejection by her earthly father and family. Pray she will be strengthened in her faith. Pray for her family that they might have their hearts softened toward Leticia and restore her daughter to her, and pray that for their sakes and for God’s glory, their hearts might be softened to the gospel. *(Source: The Voice of the Martyrs)*

China/ North Korea-- Ten North Koreans who had escaped and were hiding in Shenyang, China, have recently been forcibly repatriated to North Korea by the Chinese government. This cruel and inhumane decision occurred despite the likely risk of prison camp for all ten North Koreans, which includes a 4-year-old boy. Please pray for this group to be spared punishment and to be safely protected from the often-brutal North Korean authorities. Pray also that in the future China would safely harbor and protect defectors and not return them to North Korea. *(Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide)*

Turkey—Pastor Andrew Brunson has been languishing in a Turkish prison since October 2016. Despite requests from the US to release this innocent man, the Turkish government refuses to grant his freedom, holding him on false charging of being involved with terrorist activity. His wife recently shared this letter he send from prison thanking all who have been praying for him: "I am deeply grateful to all who have prayed for me. This trial—time in prison—has stretched me far more than I ever would have imagined. I have been very weak, had many doubts, felt very alone. I know that God's grace is sustaining me, even when I do not feel that grace, and I know that the prayers of God's people are surrounding me and giving strength. One of my big fears has been that I will be forgotten in prison. Thank you for not forgetting! It is a great encouragement to know there are people praying for me—it reminds me that I am not alone, and that I need to stand firm, with my face pointed in God's direction always. Thank you for standing with me in this most difficult time. Many blessings to you." Continue to pray that the Holy Spirit would encourage and sustain Andrew and his family through this ordeal. Pray for the guards and other prisoners surrounding him, that they might see Christ in him. Pray that God would continue to provide for all the needs of the Brunson family. And pray that his Turkish lawyers would have wisdom and that government and court officials would act with integrity and justice and release Andrew Brunson. (*Source: Middle East Concern*)

Myanmar—A year ago in January 2017, a 40-year-old man called "Tai Tai" became a believer in Shan State, Myanmar. Since that time he has been active in his church and in sharing the gospel with the Palong people, inciting the extreme ire of his village. Tragically, this resulted in a violent attack and the brutal murder of Tai Tai at the hands of other villagers this past December as Tai Tai was gathering wood. His family has fled for their lives, and local Christian missionaries gave Tai Tai a burial outside the village, because as a believer he would not be allowed to be buried in the village cemetery. Pray for the protection of and provision for Tai Tai's wife and five children. Pray for the emotional and spiritual healing and that all of them would be able to trust God through their grieving. Pray for the villagers who committed this horrific act, that they might repent and turn from darkness to light. (*Source: The Voice of the Martyrs*)

Nigeria-- British missionary and optician, Ian Squire, was recently killed by a gang who abducted him and three other missionaries from his clinic in Nigeria. On their first morning of being held hostage in a grass hut, Ian sang "Amazing Grace" to encourage his friends. Gunmen then shot him in the head, and he died instantly. The other three hostages were released three weeks later after the Nigerian government paid their ransom. Please pray for comfort for Ian's

family and friends who mourn his loss. Pray for protection for believers in Nigeria. Pray for the abductors who are spiritually blind to see the truth of the Gospel and turn from their wicked ways and follow Jesus. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)

Vietnam-- On Dec. 17, in north-central Vietnam's Nghe An province, members of a Catholic Church began digging a ditch in a field where flood waters often rise. Men wearing communist red flags began beating the parishioners in full view of the police who refused to intervene. The police chief was also present, and members of his police force ordered the thugs to attack the women of the church. One was beaten until she was unconscious. Please pray for this country where authorities not only turn a blind eye to violent persecution, but encourage and order it. Pray for protection for this community. Pray for human rights to be upheld and freedom of religion to be protected in Vietnam. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

Laos-- Six Christian couples were recently arrested and pressured to renounce their faith and stop gathering for worship. Although they were released, they are no longer permitted to meet as a church in their town and must travel to another city to gather as believers. In addition, they are being denied government assistance because of their faith. Pray for these and other Christians who make up only one percent of the Laotian population. Pray for them to persevere despite persecution, and pray that God provides for all their needs. Pray that they can continue to gather together for fellowship despite the distance they have to travel. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs*)