

## April 2024 Prayer

*When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

–1 Peter 2: 23-25

**Nigeria**—In the ongoing and escalating discrimination against Christians in northern Nigeria, the latest development is the banning of Christian worship on any college campuses. In the wake of the violent murder of Deborah Emmanuel yakubu in 2022, this development signals a move toward more persecution of believers and a greater tolerance of it among the general population. For instance, in the case of Deborah Emmanuel yakubu, two of the perpetrators were apprehended and arrested. But they were released after only a year for a failure to prosecute, despite there being actual video evidence of the brutal attack. Attack. This past year Nigeria was listed 6th on Open doors. World watch list, and 82% of Christians who are murdered in 2023 were killed in Nigeria. Please pray for believers in Nigeria in general, and especially for Christian students on college campuses that day. Will be protected, that they will remain bold in their witness and their worship. Please pray for all those who would commit violence against Christians in Nigeria, that they would be struck in their conscience about their actions and even more so find the grace and love of Jesus. (*Source: Open Doors; CBN*)

**Afghanistan**—UN Human Rights experts have expressed concern over an increased amount of arrests and detainments of women since early January. The Taliban has repeatedly accused women and girls of “bad hijab” according to its strict dress code and has increased arrests in shopping areas and schools. Some were held in custody for weeks, given only one meal per day, and even experienced physical violence. They were only released after male family members signed agreements that they would wear the proper hijab. “In addition to punishing women for what they wear, assigning responsibility for what women wear to men violates women’s agency and perpetuates an institutionalized system of discrimination, control of women and girls and further diminishes their place in society,” human rights defenders said. In addition, many single women were forced to quit their jobs because the Taliban deemed it inappropriate for unmarried women to work. Please pray for greater freedom for women and girls in this population. The situation for Christian women is even more dire. Pray for their strength and encouragement in the faith. Pray also for the humanitarian crisis in this troubled country. (*Source: UN News*)

**United States**—Unbelievably, child marriage is not illegal in the United States. In fact, only 13 states have outlawed the practice. While it may not seem like a common problem, it is in fact prevalent in a variety of communities, especially in closed and insular face groups of every religion. Most commonly child marriage is the result of coercion and is not consensual on the part of the child. Young girls are especially vulnerable, and frequently find themselves in abusive situations. In fact, Sherry Johnson who was forced to marry the man who raped her when she was 10 to cover up the crime when she became pregnant, was considered too young to file for divorce at 16 when she tried to escape her circumstances. The fact that child marriage is not illegal. Also creates another vulnerability for human trafficking. Pray that the United States would take action and finally pass federal legislation to ban all marriage under the age of 18. Please pray that legislators in the remaining 37 states would follow the example of the 13 that have already banned the practice. Pray for the protection of vulnerable girls in

the United States and around the world. Who are vulnerable to this form of exploitation and abuse. (Source: *Freedom United*)

**Uganda**—A former Muslim turned to Christ last year and is now facing persecution. He said, “I began to question my faith and the teachings of the Quran in June of last year, particularly after the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) incursion into Uganda, resulting in the tragic deaths of over 40 innocent students. Additionally, I realized I had been reciting the Quran without understanding its meaning. Radio broadcasts on Christianity deepened my understanding of God compared to the Arabic language, which I couldn’t comprehend.” After hearing about Christ, he turned to Him for salvation and was baptized. Now he is being threatened and could lose his land. Praise God for this new brother in Christ, and pray for his strength to remain steadfast. Pray that the Lord would protect him from violence and from losing his home and livelihood. Pray also that he would be a light to those around him and God’s instrument to bring others to the truth. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

**Cuba**—Give thanks that in February 2024 the United Nations working group on arbitrary detention delivered their official opinion that the arrest and detention of pastor Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo is arbitrary and contravenes Articles 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19, and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Pastor Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo was arrested and charged with disrespect, criminal incitement, and public disorder for participating in peaceful protests that took place across Cuba on July 11, 2021. While this may seem like nothing more than a symbolic gesture, groups like Christian solidarity worldwide welcome this statement from the United Nations, and their subsequent calls for a full investigation into the human rights abuses that led to this arbitrary detention. This international spotlight will hopefully pressure the Cuban government to be less likely to perpetrate these kinds of human rights crimes. Pray for pastor Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo as he endures prison. Pray for his quick release, and pray for his wife, son, and daughter who are trying to manage life without their husband and father. Father. For peace for them and comfort and provision. Pray for the government of Cuba that they might Begin to value individual rights and religious freedom in their country. (Source: *CSW*)

**Democratic Republic of Congo**—Continual violence in this country has led to a severe crisis of over 5.7 million internally displaced people. More and more surge into official displacement camps, and these already crowded locations where most live in makeshift shelters are unable to support newcomers. Many that have fled their bombed out homes arrive already physically, emotionally, and sexually abused, only to find there is no place for them. Those who do find shelter in schools, hospitals, and camps are in danger as these places are often targeted by armed groups for bombing and looting of basic supplies. Please pray for an end to this conflict. Pray for protection for the countless victims and that they would be able to receive humanitarian aid. Pray especially that they would turn to Jesus Christ for hope, comfort, and salvation. (Source: *UN Refugee Agency*)

**India**—Before you pick up that Coke or Pepsi or other favorite soda, consider how they sweeten those beverages. Much of the sugar used in Coca Cola and Pepsi products is harvested with sugar from Maharashtra state in India. The sugarcane cutting industry is rife with forced labor, bonded labor, child labor, forced child marriage, and unsafe medical practices like extremely young hysterectomies solely to avoid missed work days due to painful periods or pregnancies. Impoverished parents—often victims themselves of illegal generational debt bondage—are inclined to marry off their children, especially daughters, as young as possible to relieve themselves of financial responsibility and because a married couple can make more money than an individual as sugarcane cutting is a two-person job. In 2019 Coca Cola—along with a representative from Pepsi Co—investigated the conditions in Maharashtra and found them to be “deeply concerning,” including the interview of a girl of 10 working the fields. Ultimately though, both companies deemed it was not their responsibility to visit or monitor the

sugarcane fields, even as they have policies claiming a commitment to “root out human rights abuses in their supply chain.” Pray for the very poor and vulnerable children and adults, who find themselves working under atrocious conditions so that the world can have sweets and soda. Pray that companies would truly engage in ethical business practices and make the whole supply chain their responsibility. Pray that the One who sets the captive free will intervene and bring freedom to the families in bondage and provide for all their material needs. (Source: *The New York Times; Freedom United*)

**Vietnam**—Pastor Y Bum Bya was found dead on March 8 under mysterious circumstances, after receiving threats and attacks. In December he was beaten and forced to leave and denounce his church. Police took his phone, forbid him from contacting friends and relatives and threatened to beat him to death. On March 8, police took him to a cemetery, and he never returned. His body was later found hanging from the dome of a tomb there. Please pray for comfort for this pastor’s family and congregation. Pray also that the church there would not be threatened nor deterred by this violence. Local authorities have been trying to eliminate the church in the area, but pray that their violent efforts would only strengthen the faith of the Vietnamese believers. Pray that they would boldly proclaim the gospel and continue to meet for fellowship and that the Lord would protect them as they do so. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

**Russian/Ukraine**—In the two years since Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine there have been a documented 30,000 Ukrainian children abducted, sent to camps to be indoctrinated, and even illegally “adopted” by Russian families, as Putin fast-tracked citizenship for kidnapped children. The estimated number is much higher. A number of children have been rescued from these occupied territories, and they have described being forced to say they “love and obey Russia.” One boy reported that his diabetes medication was withheld because he refused to sing the Russian national anthem. This was just one of the many punishments doled out for not swearing allegiance to Russia. Psychological abuse was rampant as well, telling the children their families were not coming for them and that they would never be found. When one girl’s mother did finally locate, she had to go through an incredibly lengthy and costly process to “prove” she was the girl’s mother. Some parents have been imprisoned, killed, or disappeared. Russia gives the children new birth certificates and Russian passports in an attempt to eradicate their original identity, and this systemic process of abduction and erasure of identity is a part of a larger genocide going on in Ukraine. Pray for the protection of Ukrainian kids—especially those who have already been abducted. Pray that the at least 30,000 kidnapped children would be returned to their families. Pray that Vladimir Putin would be removed from power. Give thanks for organizations like Save Ukraine that is creating a kind of “underground railroad” in an attempt to rescue these kids and also provide rehabilitation for them after enduring this trauma. Pray that God would bless their work, and comfort and restore these children and their families. (Source: *CBN*)

**Nicaragua**—Last July, President Daniel Ortega and his wife and vice-president Rosaria Murillo expelled the Red Cross from the country because of their criticism of the country’s inhumane treatment of prisoners. They have also repeatedly imprisoned Catholic priests for their criticism of the government and closed hundreds of evangelical churches and organizations. After a hurricane hit in August and September, many evangelical organizations came in to provide aid and share the Gospel. This effort brought many churches together in an effort to help the community and share the good news. Soon after, the president and his wife arrested eleven pastors and closed more churches after falsely accusing them of money laundering. Praise God for the beautiful unity among churches in Nicaragua through their evangelistic campaigns. Pray that that unity would continue, as some churches are choosing to remain silent about the dictatorship to avoid persecution, while others speak out. Pray for discernment and protection for the persecuted Catholics and Evangelicals in this country that has jumped to number 30 on the Open Doors Watch List. (Source: *Christianity Today*)

