

These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. John 16:33

STANDING IN THE GAP

for the Persecuted Church

January 2019

26. PAKISTAN – pray for evangelist **Abdul**, a former Muslim who became a Christian after taking a Bible correspondence course. He shares the Gospel as the only Christian in an area that includes dozens of villages. Abdul has led 10 men to Christ so far and another 30 have shown interest. He receives frequent death threats from Islamic leaders because of his evangelism. “I know that I have to die,” he said. “But before I die, I want to share the Good News that people don’t have to go to hell. They can go to heaven.”

27. TURKEY – pray for **Baris Ozturk**, who lost both his family and his source of income when he left Islam and dedicated his life to sharing Jesus with the people of Turkey. He began helping an organization that distributes Christian materials and Bibles and connects interested Turks with local Christians. He also does live chats online where recently 40 people placed their faith in Christ. His church has also planted 3 house churches. Because the current government appears to be more influenced by Islamic ideology, he has to be more careful.

28. NORTH KOREA – pray for **Mrs Han**. Her pastor husband was kidnapped and killed by the North Korean government. Although the Hans were ethnically Korean, they were Chinese citizens living on the North Korean border and rescued starving North Koreans fleeing the country. Mrs Han has since moved to South Korea to raise their children. Please pray that the children will grow up as faithful servants of God, serving Him as their father did.

29. COLOMBIA- pray for **Alex** who serves in prison ministry. He was shot by guerrillas and lost an eye. He eventually led **Ismael**, the very man who had shot him, to the Lord. Alex is now in law school, hoping to help those who are falsely imprisoned.

30. LAOS – pray for **Somxi**, who was kicked out of her house when she became a Christian. She now lives in a new city and helps lead worship in a house church for the **Khmu minority group** each Sunday and is also involved in youth ministry. During the day she works in a sewing factory. She asks for prayer that she will soon be able to open a small sewing business, that her ministry will be done well, and that her relationships will be pleasing to the Lord.

31. CHINA – pray for **Pastor ‘Bike’** who has cycled 17,000 km across China, sharing the Gospel in 24 provinces. Police often threatened his house church in Beijing so he is now based in Qingdao, Shandong province. He leads an average of 2-3 people to Christ every day. He and his wife are planting a church for migrants and have baptized hundreds of new believers this past year. He faces ongoing pressure and persecution as well as some health issues.

“Prayer is far-reaching in its influence and worldwide in its effects. It touches man’s interests in time and eternity. Prayer lays hold upon God and moves Him to interfere in the affairs of earth.”

-E.M. Bounds

Come quickly, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen

SOURCES:

CHURCH IN CHAINS; CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE; CHRISTIAN TODAY; OPEN DOORS; PRISONER ALERT; RELEASE INTERNATIONAL; VOICE of the MARTYRS; WORLD MAGAZINE; WORLD WATCH MONITOR

1. IRAN – pray for Christian converts from Islam **Behnam Ersali and Davood Rasooli** who on Nov 16 were detained by 2 security agents. They were both arrested and are being held in an unknown location. Friends believe that they are being held in solitary confinement and undergoing interrogation in Karaj’s maximum security Rajai-Shahr Prison. Iranian Christian news agency *Mohabet News* stated, “It seems that there is a new wave of arrest and pressure against Christians.”

2. UZBEKISTAN – pray for a **Baptist Church** in Tashkent that was raided Nov 25 by the Uzbekistan’s military. 14 members were detained for interrogation.

3. INDONESIA – pray for the nation’s security. Recent church bombings are potential signs that there will be more threats. Pray that Indonesia’s programs combating terrorism will be effective.

4. TAJIKISTAN – pray for **Pastor Bahrom Holmatov**. He has been imprisoned for 3 years on false accusation of extremism. “Just keep praying for me and my family,” he asks. “I am ready to go through this.”

5. CHINA – the situation for Buddhist-background believers continues to deteriorate. A number of Chinese house churches have also been ordered to discontinue their meetings. Ask God to strengthen the underground church as religious freedoms continue to shrink.

6. ETHIOPIA – pray for **Debora, Eden, and Gifti** who ended up in jail for 3 months because they offended local Muslim leaders by sharing their faith. Open Doors supported them with prayer and trauma counselling.

7. TUNISIA – pray for the people who came to faith during Ramadan. They are now searching for groups to join to help their faith to grow. Pray they will find these groups.

8. MIDDLE EAST – pray for **Mojtaba** who became a Christian through his brother, a former drug-addict. “Jesus came into our dark house and made it a peaceful house.” Mojtaba became a leader in his house church. The police discovered their meetings and Mojtaba was taken to prison. “I have had 3 Christmases there,” he says.

9. THAILAND – pray for **Pakistani Christians** stranded in Thailand. They have lived for years in hiding from immigration authorities amid death, disease, and starvation to escape permanent imprisonment in stinking dungeons. A recent crackdown by authorities took place in Oct when about 100 Pakistani Christians were arrested and sent to Immigration Detention Centers (IDC’s). It is estimated that there are currently 300 Pakistani Christians in these IDC’s, that stink with a deadly stench, as cells have over 100 people put together without adequate space to lie down and sleep. Several heroic Thai locals have come forward to help sustain these starving asylum seekers, though the Pakistani’s are still hoping for support from other Christians around the world, who they feel have abandoned them in their agony and despair.

10. IRAN – over 100 Christians have been arrested in Iran in Dec and nearly 150 the month before as part of the government’s attempts to ‘warn’ Christians against proselytising over Christmas.

11. PAKISTAN – continue praying for **Asia Bibi**. More than a month after her acquittal was announced, she is still in protective custody and has not yet been reunited with her daughters, **Esha and Eisham**, They are living with friends of the family and have to keep moving to stay ahead of the Islamists hunting them down. It is believed that Asia’s husband, **Ashiq Masih**, is with her under government protection in a secret place.

- 12. NORTH KOREA** – pray for VOM Korea founders **Rev Eric Foley** and his wife, **Dr Hyun Sook Foley**, who work with persecuted Christians in North Korea. VOM Korea organizes balloon launches with printed Bible passages into North Korea, broadcasts the Gospel via radio and arranges training for underground North Korean Christians. The Foleys have also worked extensively with North Korean defectors. Asked how things have changed since the summits between North and South Korea and the USA and how they have impacted their ministry, Eric says that this past year has been the hardest of the 17 years by far. The South Korean government says the work that the Foleys do ‘fouls the air for peace.’
- 13. CHINA** – on Dec 9, Chinese officials launched a crackdown on Chengdu's **Early Rain Covenant Church** and its outspoken pastor, **Wang Yi**. Police broke down doors, swarmed apartment complexes and ransacked homes and detained more than 100 leaders and members of the well-known house church. Police also raided 2 dormitories of the seminary and liberal arts college associated with Early Rain and took students away. Authorities also raided other churches in the presbytery. **Li Yingqiang**, the sole Early Rain elder not in custody, asks the global church to pray “that God would give us courage and strength to deal with this persecution, that those in detention would be a good witness, and that the church members wouldn't compromise, but instead they would know that God is real and that He will protect them.”
- 14. CHINA** – continue praying for members of Early Rain Covenant Church. Elder **Li Yingqiang** was arrested 2 days after the Sunday raid. Authorities have since released some of the church members and leaders, but they remain under house arrest. At least 3 of the released Christians reported the police raped and beat them during their detention, according to China Aid. The released Christians plan to continue meeting in the church building or as smaller groups in their homes.
- 15. INDONESIA** – praise God that Jakarta's former governor, known as ‘**Ahok**’, who was sentenced last year to 2 years in jail for blasphemy against Islam, is to be released from prison in January, four months ahead of schedule. He was the first Christian and ethnic Chinese to govern Indonesia's capital since 1960.
- 16. MALAYSIA** – continue praying for church leader **Raymond Koh**, who was kidnapped in Feb 2017. His wife, **Susanna Liew**, is hopeful that he will soon be released and the culprits brought to justice after the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia inquiry into the kidnapping. Pray also for another pastor, **Joshua Hilmy** and his wife **Ruth**, who have been missing since Nov 2016.
- 17. CHINA** – continue praying for members of Early Rain Covenant Church and **Pastor Wang Yi**. His wife, **Jiang Rong**, has also been arrested. Wang has released a letter explaining his faithful disobedience to the Communist regime. Wang called the persecution of Chinese Christians ‘wicked’, saying he would serve his sentence but not plead guilty. He prayed his persecution would allow him to preach the Gospel. “I hope God uses me, by means of first losing my personal freedom, to tell those who have deprived me of my personal freedom that there is an authority higher than their authority, and that there is a freedom they cannot restrain, a freedom that fills the church of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ,” he said.
- 18. EGYPT** – pray for **Abdo Adel**, 43, a Coptic Christian who has been sentenced to 3 years in prison after he was found guilty of ‘insulting Islam in the first degree.’
- 19. UNITED STATES** – pray for Christian teacher, **Peter Vlaming**, 43, who was fired from his teaching position as French teacher in West Point, Virginia. The school said in a statement that he was fired after he refused to use male pronouns for a female student who identifies as a boy.
- 20. CHINA** – After the raid on **Early Rain Covenant Church** in Dec, those who tried to gather at the church for worship the next week found the church gate locked and every entrance guarded by police officers preventing worshippers from entering the church. Another 60 members were arrested, including an infant. In addition to these raids, many church members are under the supervision and control of community authorities in their homes. Police officers have gone to members' homes, intimidating, threatening and arresting them. Communication networks between church members have been blocked and mobile phones are being monitored. More than 10 key church members are still in criminal detention since the Dec 9 raid. Early Rain members remain strong in the face of increasing opposition, praying the following prayer:
- Lord, today we worship you in police cars. We worship you in police stations. We worship you in detention centres. We worship you in prisons. And we worship you in homes. We have no other goal except to worship you alone. We ride in buses heading to police stations as though riding down the road to Zion. For you tell us, Lord, that you are seeking worshippers who worship you in spirit and in truth. May you be pleased with our worship. We have nothing to offer you but our hearts. We offer them up sincerely to you now.*
- 21. CHINA** – Early Rain is not the only prominent house church in China to be closed in Dec. The authorities shut down **Rongguili Church** in Guangzhou on Dec 15, when more than 60 police officers and officials stormed the children's Bible class. They confiscated church property including more than 4,000 books.
- 22. PAKISTAN** - pray for Christian brothers **Qaisar, 44 and Amoon Ayub, 38**, who were sentenced to death Dec 13 by a Pakistani court after they were convicted of insulting the Prophet Mohammed.
- 23. UNITED STATES** – pray for University of California, Berkley, student **Isabella Chow**. As a member of the university's student senate, she refused to vote for a resolution condemning the Trump Administration's proposal to define ‘sex’ in federal legislation as biological rather than anything a person decides. She was verbally blasted by students during a large campus meeting, and personally attacked by the student newspaper, *The Daily Californian*, which also refused to publish her Christian response. Several campus groups condemned her. More than 1,000 students signed a petition accusing her of hatred. Read more at WORLD Magazine's website at wng.org/isabella_chow.
- 24. UZBEKISTAN** – pray for **Christian women** in Uzbekistan. Total submission is expected from women to their parents and, if married, to their husbands. This makes them more vulnerable to persecution – both as Christians and as women. Christian women and girls are suffering from verbal and physical abuse, threats, beatings, detentions, interrogations, fines, imprisonments, job loss, discrimination, excommunication, home detention, divorce and loss of possessions. From the top 50 countries on the 2018 World Watch List, 51.5 % of the countries report rape or forced marriage as a pressure point for women. Six women each day are raped, sexually harassed or forced into marriage due to their Christian faith. In **Pakistan**, horrific statistics indicate an estimated 700 Pakistani Christian girls and women are abducted each year, often raped and then forcefully married to Muslim men.
- 25. INDIA** – pray for **Pastor Kabir**, who has pastored some of India's poorest Christians for 12 years. He was attacked in 2016 by 4 men, all members of a youth militia called Hindu Yuva Vahini. He was brutally kicked and punched for 90 minutes when he continued to refuse to deny Jesus. He had a ruptured eardrum and fractured skull. Kabir asks that readers pray for his family and his continued healing. He also requests prayer for his attackers and for the very poor people who live in the area where his church is located. “I have grown in my faith and I will do double the work,” he says. “I will not be scared. Whatever God wants, let Him do.”