

World Focus for April Suffering for Jesus

When we speak about persecution of Christians many think of imprisonment, attacks on church buildings and other acts of violence. Such incidents tend to provoke headlines. However, our thinking needs to be broader to include more subtle forms of persecution, harassment, discrimination and hostility. Such actions do not receive the same level of publicity. Yet, as the Anglican Bishop of Cairo remarked, “the systemic, daily discrimination does more harm to the church in Egypt than occasional violent incidents.” (See my book *Last Resort – Migration and the Middle East*, pages 272–273.)

Even in our own country many Christians experience some forms of hostility or harassment because their allegiance to Jesus is known. This is the experience of some of our own fellowship.

A good resource on Christians suffering because they identify with Christ is the World Watch List produced by Open Doors. This overtly assesses the subtle forms of persecution, what it terms a *squeeze*, as well as violent assaults. The 2018 edition top 10 is given below.

Our Mission Partners directly involved in supporting our brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer for their faith is **Ian & Wendy’s** work in support of Christian communities across the Middle East and North Africa. Our Mission Partners **Dan & Narineh** regard their work in scripture translation in Asia as contributing to enabling people to respond well to injustice.

Two notes on terminology. First please avoid the term ‘persecuted church.’ How many churches does Jesus have? Surely, just one, some of which is persecuted, and let us keep in mind that we all find it challenging to live an authentically Christian life. Second, please avoid anything that can be construed as us and them. Increasingly in the Middle East I hear pleas from Christian leaders asking us to avoid us versus them terminology. This applies to both West versus region and also within the region to Christians and others. The concern here is that such language creates conflicts, playing in to segregation on religious and/or ethnic lines that is the root of so many problems. My book *Identity Crisis* addresses this subject.

World Watch List 2018: the top 10

North Korea 1st, Afghanistan 2nd, Somalia 3rd, Sudan 4th, Pakistan 5th, Eritrea 6th, Libya 7th, Iraq 8th, Yemen 9th and Iran 10th

World Watch List: www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/

Intercessions on Sundays:

Please use a selection of the following.

Suffering for Jesus:

- For Christians in any of the countries on the World Watch List, asking that they would remain faithful in witness and testimony whatever is going on around them

- Pray **with** Christians not **for** them, asking that they respond wisely to injustice, that perpetrators of injustice know and respond to the Spirit's conviction of sin and accept the offer of forgiveness and new life through faith in Jesus
- For Christian communities in places afflicted by violence that has a religious component to its motivation. (Other factors underlying violence often include tribal, economic and political considerations). Examples at present include parts of Burma/Myanmar, Central African Republic, Egypt, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. (This list is not exhaustive.)
- For Christian communities in countries/regions with authoritarian and very repressive governments, e.g. North Korea, Chechnya and Eritrea. (This list is far from exhaustive.)
- For those facing injustice, including amongst our fellowship, from unreasonable bosses, denial of "reasonable accommodation" for conscientious objection, contentious neighbours, etc., asking that they know the Spirit's guiding wisdom to respond in a Christ-like manner.
- For those whose obedience to Jesus takes them into situations that the world would assess as uncomfortable or sacrificial. One local example is Street Pastors.

Specific Mission Partner: Ian & Wendy

- Use anything from MENA Matters and anything not labelled as confidential from their "Home and Prayer Groups prayer requests" both of which are available by email

Specific Mission Partner: Dan & Narineh (see above)

- Pray for Dan's work that he will effectively enable many to become skilled translators of scripture and other literature and for his own continuing development into his role as a linguistic consultant
- Pray for God's provision of gifted and passionate local people for the numerous translation projects to which Dan is acting as a consultant

Knowing Jesus Christ and sharing His hope:

- Pray that many find peace with God because of how each of us lives our daily lives
- Likewise, pray that all involved with each of our mission partners will make Jesus accessible to many by how they live their lives and do what they do