

Open *Doors*

PRAYER DIARY | September/October 2022



**"You are the light
of the world.
A city set on a hill
cannot be hidden."**

MATTHEW 5:14 (ESV)

SEPTEMBER

Hope for the Middle East

Thursday 1 September

Praise God that, despite a decade of war, persecution and pandemic, the church in Syria and Iraq continues to shine as a beacon of hope, thanks to your support for the *Hope for the Middle East* campaign. "I see that the Lord answered the prayers of the people," says Open Doors partner Pastor Edward, in Syria. "God gave protection, safety. He enabled us to reach out and bring the light of Christ even further."

Friday 2 September - Syria

Many Christians have left Syria since the war began. "Over 60 per cent of the members have left the country, especially those in leadership positions," says Pastor Edward (see Magazine p8). "This has put a burden on the leaders who stayed." Ask the Lord to encourage leaders like Pastor Edward and renew their strength daily.

Saturday 3 September - Syria

Although the war in Syria is largely over, its impact remains. "Many people say that this collapsed economy is even worse," says Pastor Edward. "For the first time you now see the middle class in Syria close to starvation." Ask God to bless Centres of Hope supporting people with food, clothes and medical care.

Sunday 4 September - Syria

Praise God that, with the help of Open Doors supporters, 160 Centres of Hope have been established across Syria. Pray for wisdom for those providing vocational training and income-generating projects for those caught in poverty and pray for the economic crisis to be solved.

Monday 5 September - Syria

Alaa (37) was displaced from Homs to the village of Al Hwash. He recently started a saw-mill business with the support of the local Centre of Hope. Ask God to bless this project so he can provide for his family and his brothers' families as they work with him.

Tuesday 6 September - Syria

Iktimal* fled her home when militants targeted her village because of its Christian population. The Centre of Hope in Latakia helped her, her husband and six children with food, rent and spiritual care. "God sent those people to stand with us," she says. "They were like angels." Ask God to bless her as she now serves in children's ministry at the Centre of Hope.

Wednesday 7 September - Syria

Many students now find it impossible to pay their university fees and travel costs. Thank God for several Centres of Hope that are helping students with the finances needed to continue their studies.

Thursday 8 September - Syria

Praise God that, even though the government is tightening

its grip on Syria's borders, our partners were able to hold five training programmes over the summer, including a women's ministry programme in southern Syria. Ask God to water the seeds sown in these women's lives so they bear much fruit.

Friday 9 September - Iraq

More than 80 per cent of Iraq's Christians have fled the country since 2003. Pray for church leaders like Fady who have chosen to stay to serve their communities. "It is important for Iraq to keep a Christian presence," says Fady. "As Christians, we are the salt of the earth. We have an ancient Christianity here. Our presence in this country is important."

Saturday 10 September - Iraq

Praise God for the many families who have bravely chosen to return and restore their villages in the Nineveh Plains. Pray for Open Doors partners providing families with livelihood training and income-generation loans to help them rebuild their lives.

Sunday 11 September - Iraq

When Khalis returned to his village in 2017, he struggled to find work. But with help from an Open Doors partner, he was able to open an aluminium factory. Ask the Lord to establish the work of his hands (Psalm 90:17) so he can provide for his family.

Monday 12 September - Iraq

Many Iraqi Christians struggle to know whether to remain in Iraq due to ongoing insecurity. Pray for wise leaders who will

support and guide believers making difficult decisions for the future of their families.

Tuesday 13 September - Iraq

Give thanks that, with the help of Open Doors supporters, at least 126 churches in Iraq have been turned into Centres of Hope. "I know for sure that our work has contributed to people staying," says Thomas*, who oversees the work in the region. "The church has become smaller, but it is still vibrant."

Wednesday 14 September - Iraq

Church leaders in Iraq carry a heavy burden. Pray that 'our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, will equip [them] with everything good for doing His will' (Hebrews 13:20-21), as they shepherd those in their care.

Thursday 15 September - Iraq

'Voice of Peace' is a Christian radio station that reaches up to 150,000 people across Iraq and the Middle East. Ask God to speak through its broadcasts to strengthen the church and improve the church's standing in Iraqi society.

Go to
opendoorsuk.org/makehopelast

to join in raising one million prayers of hope for Christians in Syria and Iraq. Add your light to the interactive map so that Christians all over the world can see we are uniting in prayer.



*Name changed for security reasons

Give thanks for **ANSWERED PRAYER**



Then and now: six years of restoration in Iraq

SEE HOW YOUR PRAYERS HAVE SUSTAINED CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ LIKE ESTEPHAN AS THEY REBUILD

“One day, all of us will return to Karamles,” said Father Thabet (ABOVE) in 2016. He was speaking from a refugee camp in Erbil, where he was living with his church after so-called Islamic State (IS) invaded their homes. Father Thabet and the Christians from Karamles eventually returned home – and they have been able to stay and rebuild their lives thanks to your faithful prayers.

One of the Christians who returned to Karamles in 2016 with Father Thabet was carpenter Estephan Matti (BELOW). He reopened his workshop and got to work



right away, fixing up local houses and businesses. “The first thing I did was to close and lock all the doors of the houses, for they were broken into by IS fighters,” he remembers.

“I have hope that everything will change for the better”

“I overcame difficulties by working hard – and volunteered a lot with Father Thabet with anything he asked me. I have learned to have patience. And I have learned that God is always with us, to not think too much about the future but just rely on Him.”

Estephan recalls some of the hardships he, his wife and two children have gone



through. “Some of the most frightening days had been right before we had to flee. We lived in a miserable situation and there was no electricity or running water.”

But he continued to hold onto God’s promises – in particular, Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:26: “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”

When families started returning to the village, a committee was established which had the daunting task of carrying out reconstruction activities. Estephan, now 55, has been an enormous help to his community. “I used to help the committee,” he says. “I adapted to the situation and became optimistic and have the hope that everything will change for the better. I’m encouraging people to visit us.”

Estephan is also grateful for your prayers – he knows they have made a huge difference to the restoration of homes and lives in Karamles: “When I pass through difficulties, I pray the Lord’s prayer. Then I feel the power that is empowering Christians. I feel united and I feel all the Christians around the world pray with me.”

PLEASE PRAY:

- For Estephan to be strengthened and encouraged in his work
- For continued healing for displaced Christians in Iraq
- That the Holy Spirit will help the church in Karamles to flourish.

> You can find more stories from the Christians of Karamles at opendoorsuk.org

ABOVE, BELOW Since 2016, many damaged homes and churches in Iraq have been restored. Estephan has played an enormous part in the restoration work in Karamles, enabling many to return home



| Middle East

Friday 16 September – Lebanon

Praise God, schools are starting again. Last year, serious unrest in the country meant that some schools were closed, and it was thought schools that did open would be closed by Christmas. Please pray that all schools will remain open, and that the children attending will learn in safety.

Saturday 17 September – Lebanon

Despite the many economic and political issues facing the country, the church in Lebanon keeps on sharing the hope of the gospel. Please pray that believers will make use of the many opportunities they have to minister to the people around them, so that whole communities will encounter the love of Jesus.

Sunday 18 September – Iran

Many young people feel disillusioned due to increasing economic and social pressures. This can lead to leaving the country, addiction, and even thoughts of suicide. Please pray that these young people will recognise that God has a plan for their lives, and that they will receive the support they need.

Monday 19 September – Iran

Earlier this year, an Iranian-Armenian pastor was sentenced to ten years in prison and two Christian women converts to six years for their leadership roles in house churches. Ask the Lord to sustain Malihe Nazari,

Joseph Shahbazian and Mina Khajavi (PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) spiritually and physically, and pray for a just judiciary system, so that these Christians' sentences will be overturned.



Tuesday 20 September – Turkey

Protestant Christians and converts to Christianity lack legal recognition as a church and faith community, and as a result their rights to freedom of religion or belief are restricted. Pray that God will give these believers wisdom and creativity to meet together safely to worship, and for restrictions against them to ease.

Wednesday 21 September – Oman

Pray for several local tribes who are isolated and do not have translations of the Bible in their language yet. Ask the Lord to break down cultural and linguistic barriers to allow believers to form key relationships with people in these tribes so they can learn their languages.

Thursday 22 September – Oman

Many smaller rural villages in the south and west of Oman have no contact or interaction with Christian believers. Pray that the inhabitants of these communities will encounter Christ in dreams and visions, and meet Christians in larger towns.

Friday 23 September – Middle East

The impact of meeting together for teaching, fellowship and prayer in a safe environment cannot be overstated. Praise the Lord that, in the last few months across the Middle East, several activities for women, children and families took place which were a great blessing to all who attended.

Saturday 24 September – UK and Ireland

Father Daniel, who runs a Centre of Hope in Iraq, will be speaking tonight at our annual gathering, *Standing Strong* (see magazine p7). Pray that God will use his words to challenge, inspire and equip Christians in the UK and Ireland – and that they will be encouraged to keep praying for our persecuted church family in the Middle East.

| North Africa

Sunday 25 September – Algeria

This year, Algeria is number 22 on the World Watch List. This is largely due to the rising number of churches being closed, and a clampdown on activities that could offend, or seek to convert, Muslims. Please pray for continuing wisdom and strength for church leaders in the country.

Monday 26 September – Algeria

Many believers are now without a church, as the government has closed so many in recent years. Please pray that they will stand

strong in their faith and that God will connect them with other believers living near to them with whom they can meet in safety.

Tuesday 27 September – Libya

There are very few Christians in Libya, and choosing to follow Jesus often leads to great suffering. Pray for Ezekiel* who is struggling with heavy persecution. Ask God to comfort him in his distress, and to heal him both physically and mentally.

Wednesday 28 September – Morocco

Anwar*, Fatima* and Adam* are all facing intense pressure from family and friends to renounce their faith in Jesus. Pray that they would not lose heart but would be inwardly renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Thursday 29 September – Tunisia

Political unrest is increasing as Tunisia's president attempts to introduce a new constitution. Pray that God will bring stability to the country, and that despite persecution, the church's witness will draw more Tunisians to Christ's love.

Friday 30 September – Tunisia

Zara* and Mohsin* are facing extreme pressure from their families because of their decision to follow Jesus. Pray that they will find other believers who will stand with them and strengthen them, and that God will soften the hearts of their families.

*Names changed for security reasons



Feeding the forgotten

YOUR SUPPORT IS HELPING A CENTRE OF HOPE FEED 150 ELDERLY PEOPLE.

Nariman calls them the 'forgotten individuals' – the 150 elderly people in al-Hawash in Syria who twice weekly enjoy a delicious meal and precious fellowship through a Centre of Hope funded by Open Doors supporters like you.

Such a need was unthinkable prior to 2011. "People had enough, no one was in need, we had a good life," explains Nariman, who was living in Homs at the time. But war broke out, causing untold devastation across the country. The pharmacy Nariman worked at was destroyed, as was her home.

Her husband was kidnapped and threatened.

Having lost everything, the couple moved to al-Hawash (around 50km west of Homs), where they've started their own business. Their income is less than a sixth of what they were earning in Homs. "We are okay," says Nariman, whose own experiences are the impetus behind her work at the charity kitchen. "I know how the people are suffering," she says.

The kitchen was set up in 2018 by Mar Elias Greek Orthodox Church, which is a Centre of Hope. Nariman, together with

another lady called Nazek, runs the initiative. "We want to stand with the elderly people who are left alone with no one caring for them," Nariman says. Food served includes *kibbeh*, a national Syrian dish comprising croquettes stuffed with ingredients including ground meat, onions and spices.

"We want to stand with the elderly people who are left alone with no one caring for them."

"We help those people who can't help themselves," she continues. "Their children have often left the country, or they don't have children at all. The forgotten individuals."

"The need is huge," adds Nazek. "Without this food, the situation of these people would be miserable." The food is delivered, meaning recipients also benefit from precious fellowship. "About 20 people from the church are volunteering for the project. We work in shifts. We love to help people."

Nariman and Nazek have both suffered from breast cancer in recent years. "The doctors forbade us to do any work," continues Nazek. "When we are doing this work, all our tiredness goes away. We know what people are going through, as we suffered ourselves, too."



A volunteer prepares food for the elderly

PLEASE PRAY

- That God will strengthen, protect and encourage Nariman and Nazek, and all volunteers, in their work
- That the initiative will be equipped to reach all local elderly who are in need
- That peace and stability will return to Syria.

GET COOKING!

Learn how to make dishes from Syria, Nigeria and India, all while raising money for your persecuted family, with our resource *Bake With Them*. Order at opendoorsuk.org/fundraise



OCTOBER

Hope for the Middle East

Saturday 1 October

Due to the Covid crisis and the war in Ukraine, Syria and Iraq have almost disappeared from the news. Yet the work of Open Doors partners in both countries is still urgent. "You need to understand that the crisis is not over here," says Pastor Edward from Damascus. Ask God to continue to wake up the global church to the plight of His people in Syria and Iraq.

Sunday 2 October - Syria

Praise God that Open Doors partners have been able to provide hundreds of Syrian families with microloans to help them start their own businesses. Pray that these loans will restore people's dignity and enable them to provide for their families.

Monday 3 October - Syria

When Njoud (42) lost her husband to Covid, she couldn't afford to feed her family. "I wanted to give up. I hit rock bottom." Give thanks that her church has given her an income-generating loan to help her open a gift shop. "Now I have an income, I don't need to ask for help anymore," she says.

Tuesday 4 October - Syria

In most cities, electricity is only available for short periods each day. This makes studying very difficult for students. Several Centres

of Hope have created 'study zones' where students can access electricity to charge laptops, light to read, and the internet for research. Pray that many students will benefit from these zones.

Wednesday 5 October - Syria

Lack of electricity also affects the elderly and immobile. Lifts in apartment buildings don't function, so they can't leave their apartments. Pray for those who feel isolated. Thank God for church leaders like Father Fadi who take communion to the elderly in their homes.

Thursday 6 October - Syria

Pray for a group of 35 students in Damascus who visit elderly people to encourage them. Praise God that these visits are proving mutually beneficial. "The students themselves are encouraged too," says Father Rami, who started the project. "They learn from the elderly, and some say they are more motivated to stay in the country."

Friday 7 October - Syria

Since the start of 2022, the government has rejected many visa applications. Many of our training activities had to be postponed since trainers come from outside Syria. Pray for the government to be more welcoming to teachers, and ask God to provide solutions when a trainer isn't allowed into the country.

Saturday 8 October - Syria

Several Centres of Hope in Syria offer tutoring lessons to children. "This is a real

need," says Father Fadi from Latakia. "The system is very weak and the classes, due to displacement, are very big; we sometimes have 50 to 60 children in one classroom." Pray that many children will benefit from extra lessons.

Sunday 9 October - Iraq

Neda and her two daughters were displaced from Mosul in 2014 when so-called Islamic State (IS) invaded. She still cannot go home as the city remains unsafe. She now works in Erbil where she is trying to build a strong community in her church. Ask for God's wisdom as she serves His people.

Monday 10 October - Iraq

The occupation of the Nineveh Plains by IS has left deep wounds in many people's lives. Give thanks for three trauma care centres set up to provide trauma awareness courses and retreats for local Christians. Pray that the centre will bring healing and peace to many who are in pain.

Tuesday 11 October - Iraq

Pray for 30 caregivers taking part in a two-year trauma care school. "Wounds as deep as we are facing here aren't fixed with one training," says Wisam, one of our partners running the programme (BELOW). "Creating awareness and achieving healing takes time. It might take years, generations.



We have no other way: We must become people of peace."

Wednesday 12 October - Iraq

Thank God for a counselling school set up to provide training for Christians in topics like pastoral care, trauma healing, marriage and family counselling. Pray that those who attend will be equipped to help those in need.

Thursday 13 October - Iraq

Many young people from the Nineveh Plain are unemployed and struggling to find jobs. Pray for Open Doors partners providing training in livelihood skills to give young people hope for the future.

Friday 14 October - Iraq

Pray for the future of the church in Baghdad. Decades of war and persecution have had a huge impact on Iraq's young Christians. Ask the Lord to give them courage and strength to deal with the difficulties ahead, and pray for an Open Doors partner training young leaders to lead churches.

Saturday 15 October - Iraq

Pray for wisdom for Open Doors partners as they strengthen the church for the future. "The support of the worldwide church has been amazing," says local partner, Shefa*. "We cannot say enough how thankful we are. We hope we can continue to count on your support as we help the community to further rebuild itself and heal from its wounds. What a war takes away in one minute, takes years to rebuild. We are not at the end of that journey yet."

*Name changed for security reasons



“Jesus led us back here”

An update on Noah from Iraq

FIVE YEARS AFTER RETURNING HOME, NOEH SHARES ABOUT LIFE IN KARAMLES

“I’m not afraid to live here again, because the Holy Spirit makes me strong.”

This is what 12-year-old Noeh said, standing in the ashes of what was once his bedroom. His family had finally returned to his home in Karamles, Iraq, after they fled so-called Islamic State (IS) three years earlier. You might remember that it was Noeh who presented the *Hope for the Middle East* petition to the UN in 2017. With your help, Noeh and hundreds of other families have since returned to Karamles. Your prayers and support helped to repair homes and provide food aid, trauma training and income-generating projects.

Noeh is now 18 years old, and a shepherd. He enjoys football

and spends time with his friends in coffee shops after work. But although he is glad to have returned to his home, life is still difficult for him and the young people of Karamles.

“Most of my friends have left Karamles,” he says. “But now



I have made new friends... It's good to live here, but there are no job opportunities. For this reason, people think to go for work in other places.”

When he was 12, Noeh wanted to be a teacher. But with the lack of opportunities in the town, Noeh has had to rethink. “Our opportunities here are very few; most of the young people here want to become soldiers. For the future, my dream is to become a soldier, only the soldiers here are living well.”

“We came back to rebuild and stay here”

Noeh’s mother, Almas, is grateful to God for allowing them to return home. “When we were displaced, we never thought that we would come back; we said, ‘It’s over.’

“When we came back, we saw our house was burned. Thanks be to God, we worked on it right away. It was tiring, but we reconstructed it, praise God.”

Despite the challenges he faces, Noeh’s love for his home is strong. “Our house is here, so we wanted to

come back... Karamles is our village, we came back to rebuild and stay here.

“Jesus is very important for us; He saved us and He led us back here safely.”

PRAY

- For Noeh and his family, that God will provide for them and help them to flourish
- That more opportunities for jobs would become available in Karamles
- That Noeh and all young people in Iraq will know God’s good plans for them, plans to give them ‘hope and a future’ (Jeremiah 29:11).

OPPOSITE Five years ago, Noeh presented the *Hope for the Middle East* petition at the UN; BELOW Now he is determined to stay in Karamles



| Afghanistan

Sunday 16 October

In a neighbouring country, Afghan Christian refugees are doing jobs such as pushing trolleys to survive. Some husbands and fathers remain in Afghanistan, but families can't communicate with them to know if they're alive. But they're holding onto Jesus. Pray for provision of needs and that families will be reunited.

Monday 17 October

In June, an earthquake struck Afghanistan, killing around 1,000 people and injuring more than 1,500. Emergency relief is not reaching many of those affected by the disaster. Pray that aid will reach them.

Tuesday 18 October

Women, children and the elderly are among those especially at the mercy of the Taliban, while young men are prone to being influenced by the extremist regime. Pray for their protection and that opportunities will emerge for them to flourish.

Wednesday 19 October

In response to the US Department of State's report that religious minorities face persecution in Afghanistan, the Taliban said, "Sunnis, Shiites, Sikhs and Hindus practise their religion freely." Christians were not mentioned. Pray that Taliban attitudes towards believers will soften.

| Asia

Thursday 20 October – China

During interrogation about his Christian activities, Zeng*

told the authorities about how Jesus transformed his brother's and sister-in-law's lives. "If believing in Christ is this edifying, please go ahead with your faith, only when you are not in touch with any foreigners," they replied. Praise God for this encounter.

Friday 21 October – Myanmar

The ongoing civil war – which has been exacerbated by the military coup in February 2021 – has left churches destroyed, much to the distress of believers. Many Christians have also been left homeless and struggling for food. Pray for Open Doors partners as they work to meet people's spiritual, physical and emotional needs.

Saturday 22 October – Nepal

Shanta* is under intense pressure from her family, including her daughters, to renounce her faith in Jesus. Another believer called Sarita* is facing financial hardship because of hostility from her husband. Pray that the Holy Spirit will fill our sisters with comfort and courage.

Sunday 23 October – Indonesia

Evelyn (16) was severely burned by one of the bombs detonated at three churches in Surabaya in 2018. She suffers with low self-esteem and covers her scars to avoid comments, questions and sympathy. Pray that an experience of God's gentleness will bring healing and confidence.

Monday 24 October – Brunei

Christianity is often portrayed negatively in Brunei, which can put intense pressure on young believers. This includes aggressive questioning by teachers and peers. Many have turned away from their faith. Ask the Lord to restore them.

Tuesday 25 October – Laos

In September, persecution survival training took place in an area where Christians are especially susceptible to opposition. Pray that the training will equip attendees to face future challenges with courage and faith.

Wednesday 26 October – Bhutan

Sonam* is a divorcee with two sons and the only Christian in her family. Her parents are trying to force her to turn away from her faith. Pray that she will stand firm, and that her sons, parents and wider family will come to faith in Jesus.

Thursday 27 October – Sri Lanka

At the time of writing, the country is experiencing political and economic turmoil. Food and fuel shortages – among other issues – are gravely affecting Christians and local partners. Pray that there will be no barriers to local partners reaching those in need.



BELOW Churches give food to public workers in Sri Lanka

Friday 28 October – Bangladesh

Shortly after his baptism, Hanif's* secret Christian faith was discovered by his Muslim family who severely beat him. He's still living with them and has been threatened with divorce (he has two children). Pray for Hanif's healing and protection, and that attitudes towards him will soften.

Saturday 29 October – India

Goa could possibly become India's 12th state to introduce anti-conversion laws. These laws – which are commonly used to falsely accuse believers – could greatly affect Goa's strong Christian population. Pray that efforts to make this happen will be thwarted.

Sunday 30 October – Philippines

Tabari* and Raf* lost their jobs as fishermen because of their faith. They are both from Muslim backgrounds. "Even if we were fired, we are content because we know we have Jesus," says Tabari. Give thanks for their courageous faith and pray that they will quickly find new jobs.

Monday 31 October – Vietnam

Liêm* and Hao* were leading a Bible study for new Christians when the authorities arrested and beat them. They were detained for two days and have since been stripped of government benefits. The incident has frightened the new believers. Pray that what the enemy meant for harm God will use for good (Genesis 50:20).

*Names changed for security reasons



JOIN US FOR

IDOP ONLINE 2022

UNITING IN PRAYER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Sunday 6 November | 7.30 - 8.30pm

Would you like the opportunity to join with others to pray for our persecuted family? This year, we're again joining with our friends at the Evangelical Alliance, Release International and CSW to mark the International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church – and we'd love for you to be there!

In line with our *Hope for the Middle East* campaign, we'll be sharing the latest from Iraq, where Christians are looking to return to their homes and rebuild their lives following years of conflict. We'll also hear updates and stories from China and Cuba, and pray into the Freedom of Religion or

Belief (FoRB) Ministerial that took place in July.

Our persecuted family frequently tell us the difference your prayers make to their lives. This event represents another precious opportunity to remind them that they are not alone.

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

- 2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9

To register, go to **opendoorsuk.org/idop**



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