

Open *Doors*

PRAYER DIARY | May/June 2023



“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.”

ISAIAH 60:1

| Nigeria

Monday 1 May

Violent persecution in Nigeria has reached unprecedented levels, with 5,014 Christians killed last year and 4,726 Christians abducted, according to Open Doors research. Pray that Nigeria's newly-elected government will take the protection of its people seriously, no matter their religion, tribe or gender, and take action to counter extremist ideology and violence.

Tuesday 2 May

Pray for political stability following February's general elections. Ask God to give wisdom to pastors ministering to those disheartened by the outcome. Pray that young Christians who feel dejected will guard their hearts against apathy and remember that their hope is in God, and not in the rulers of this world (Psalm 146).

Wednesday 3 May

Extremist groups such as Boko Haram in the north and Fulani militants in the Middle Belt continue to carry out brutal attacks on Christian communities. Pray that the president and state governors will work transparently to find lasting solutions to the deepening security crisis. Ask God to work through Christians as His instruments to bring justice and peace to the country.

Thursday 4 May

When Ayuba's* father was murdered by Boko Haram

militants, he vowed to take revenge (see Magazine p8). Praise God that, after receiving help at an Open Doors trauma care centre, he chose instead to forgive. "I said I would never forgive, but now I have forgiven totally," he shares. "I thank you so much; it is because of you that I have peace in my mind now."

Friday 5 May

Pray for Open Doors partners strengthening the church in Nigeria through relief aid, trauma care, discipleship training and economic empowerment projects. Ask God to provide the resources to keep this work going, and to protect our partners who often work in dangerous and difficult circumstances.

Saturday 6 May – UK

As the coronation of King Charles takes place today, ask the Holy Spirit to give him wisdom to seek God's kingdom first and strength to serve the people of the UK. Charles has long been an advocate for the church in the Middle East. Pray that he would use his influence to uphold the values of religious freedom across the Commonwealth.

| **Sub-Saharan Africa****Sunday 7 May**

More Christians were killed for their faith last year in sub-Saharan Africa than in the rest of the world combined. The African church is asking us to stand with them against this shocking violence. Pray that the *Arise Africa* campaign will

awaken and unite the global church in prayer and action, so that Christians in sub-Saharan Africa will be strengthened to remain courageous witnesses to Jesus.

Monday 8 May

Jihadist groups are active in an increasing number of countries in the region. Their reign of terror has a devastating impact, with governments unable to provide security. Pray for leaders and governments, for wisdom to secure their nations and provide an environment where citizens are safe.

Tuesday 9 May

The church in sub-Saharan Africa has the largest number of under 25s in the world - and there is an unprecedented onslaught against them. Pray that these young people will be filled with hope and faith that their future remains secure in God.

Wednesday 10 May

Pray for the jihadists and militants who are persecuting Christians. Ask the Lord to turn their hearts away from hatred and violence, and pray that they will encounter the perfect love of Jesus.

Thursday 11 May – Nigeria

Violent persecution is especially devastating for young people, and puts their future in jeopardy. Pray that young people will hold firm to their faith. "I want my fellow Christians to pray that we will live lives that glorify God," says Ayuba. "Also, pray for us here in Nigeria experiencing terrorism. Pray with us that God will bring an end to it."

Friday 12 May – Burkina Faso

Christians face increasing targeting by jihadists. People are being killed and churches destroyed. Pray for protection for Christians and their leaders facing these dangers. Pray for grace to continue living out the gospel as they face increased persecution.

Saturday 13 May – Mali

The church in northern Mali has not yet recovered from the Islamic extremist uprising in 2021, which displaced thousands. Although some Christians have returned to the north under police protection, they still live under the threat of attack. Ask the Lord to protect and provide for His church, and pray that Christians will have courage to keep sharing Christ with those around them.

Sunday 14 May

Open Doors partners are serving Christians across the region with relief aid, trauma care, training and livelihood support. Pray for continued strength for their work, and ask God to work through them to help persecuted believers become resilient, resourceful, and powerful in their witness for Christ.

Monday 15 May – Nigeria

There are over 100 million Christians in Nigeria – roughly half the population. Give thanks that the church continues to grow despite persecution. Pray that Christians will have courage and wisdom to live lives that honour Christ, even in the face of increasing discrimination and attack.

*Names changed for security reasons

Give thanks for **ANSWERED PRAYER**

**“You helped
to carry our
burden”**



We've asked you to pray for Christians in Burkina Faso as Islamic militants cause untold devastation. Fati has experienced fear and loss, but she feels your prayers.

“I live in permanent fear,” says Fati*, a young mother and wife. “Whenever I hear a gunshot, I get scared, and I think they are back to kill us all.”

Living in fear is a daily reality for believers like Fati in Burkina Faso, where Islamic militants have driven more than two million people

from their homes since the insurgency in Mali began spilling over in 2016.

Fati remembers the first time the militants attacked her village. They spent the day firing their weapons, before leaving and returning three days later. “This time, they went through the entire village,

shooting at everything and everyone,” she recalls.

After a third attack, locals began taking supplies to a nearby village, in case they had to flee – but the militants caught wind of their plan. “The terrorists then placed explosives along the road to stop the displaced people from reaching safety,” shares Fati.

The attacks on Fati's village continued with increasing devastation, including one occasion when Fati was in a nearby village dropping off supplies whilst her husband and children were at home attending a prayer meeting.

**“God will be with
us no matter what”**

Learning of the attack, Fati ran home fearing the worst. “When I got to the village, I couldn't find the children or my husband. I finally found them hiding in nearby bush.”

The family fled to the nearby village before heading to the capital, Ouagadougou. “On our way to the city, the few things that I was able to save from home were stolen,” continues Fati. “We were empty-handed, and we didn't have any food or housing.”

But through the upheaval, trauma and loss, the family know that they've never been alone. “The Bible says that we will face trials in this world. But He says He will make a way for us. We believe these words written in the Bible. And this gives us life. It strengthens



our faith and brings joy into our lives. When I think God has forsaken us, I remember His words in the Bible. He tells us that He will be with us no matter what.

“I'd like to thank all those who supported us in prayer,” adds Fati. “You helped us to carry our burden. God has answered our prayers. He saved us from hardship, problems and temptations.”

PLEASE PRAY

- For the healing of Fati's husband, who is struggling with his mental health following the attacks
- For wisdom for Open Doors local partners as they support Fati's family and other displaced Christians
- For peace, stability and security in Burkina Faso.

*Name changed for security reasons

Earthquake update

Tuesday 16 May – Syria

Praise God that churches of all denominations in Aleppo and Latakia are working together to meet the needs of those affected by the earthquake. Pray for continued wisdom and unity for those coordinating the work.

Wednesday 17 May – Syria

Revd Ibrahim*, an Open Doors partner in Aleppo, asks for prayer for churches running clinics to help provide people with free medical help. "If you are sick and want to go to the doctor, they will ask for LS25,000 (Syrian pounds) just to examine you. Whenever people speak to me, I suggest they support the clinic run by the church – to give medicine to the people for free," he says.

Thursday 18 May – Syria

Leyla*, another Open Doors partner in the region, says, "We really need to pray for Open Doors partners in Syria. They are emotionally stressed and physically tired. This is not a sprint; it's a marathon. So, we need to pray for strength, for peace, for rest, for emotional healing. And for the leaders to have the wisdom to know how to deal with this."

Friday 19 May – Turkey

Praise God that Iranian refugee Sahar* and her family, who now live in Turkey, escaped the worst of the damage done by the earthquakes. Yet her heart still breaks for the country. "Pray for all the people who are suffering and are left homeless and hopeless because of the earthquake," she says.

Saturday 20 May – Turkey

Sahar shares how the earthquake has made life even more difficult for refugees: "We already face so many problems as refugees, we barely receive our basic human rights," she says. "Now, with this crisis, the discrimination is worse than before." Ask God to provide for the needs of believers and end the discrimination against them.

| Middle East

Sunday 21 May – Iraq

In March, a group of priests and lay leaders from different churches attended their first Open Doors-run leadership training sessions of the year. Pray that the training will help them find solutions to the challenges they face in their villages and towns, and that they will be able to convey what they learn to their congregations.

Monday 22 May – Iraq

Pray that the church in northern Iraq will be able to build up new leaders who know their home-language – Syriac – as well as Kurdish and Arabic. It's challenging, but it's important to be able to reach out to their communities.

Tuesday 23 May – Lebanon

Praise God for the Christian radio and TV outlets in Lebanon that are reaching the wider Arab world and blessing those who watch and listen with the Word of God. Pray that the message of salvation will reach those who do not yet know the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Wednesday 24 May – Lebanon

In some regions, parents are struggling to pay the tuition fees for their children to attend Christian schools. Without that, schools cannot pay the teachers' salaries, or afford the electricity bills. Ask the Lord to provide for these schools financially to keep children learning.

Thursday 25 May – Syria

The civil war in Syria has led to hundreds of thousands of deaths, massive displacement and a deep economic crisis. Many people, including Christians, have fled the country. Pray for an end to the conflict, and that God will give a hope and a future to those Christians who have courageously stayed.

Friday 26 May – Syria

The Centre of Hope in the Nazarene Church in Latakia provides educational support to children, helping them with private tutoring. The children also do spiritual activities to teach them more about God. Pray that these children will encounter Jesus in their studies and grow strong in faith.

Saturday 27 May – Arabian Peninsula

Learning to live as a follower of Christ within a strict Muslim culture is a challenge facing believers in the Arabian Peninsula. Pray for Christians who face persecution from work colleagues and from their own families. Ask the Lord to give them the right words to say to their persecutors when they are harassed or questioned.

Sunday 28 May – Pentecost

"They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:3-4). Pray for persecuted believers around the world to be filled anew with the Holy Spirit and for fresh boldness and courage to preach the gospel.

| Central Asia

Monday 29 May

Pastor Tahir*, a former member of the KGB, now leads a secret house church. He asks that we pray for protection for them, as their church is too small to be registered, which is why it must stay secret. "May the eyes of neighbours and officials be blind to our meetings," he says. "Pray also that new believers would receive more strength and courage."

Tuesday 30 May

Open Doors helps Christians in Central Asia with vocational training and microloans. Praise God that a group of women recently completed vocational training. Many of them are the only Christians in their families, but this programme encouraged these women and gave them new hope.

Wednesday 31 May

When Nira* accepted Jesus, she faced opposition from her family. After attending the women's training programme, she started her own business making and selling jewellery. Ask God to bless Nira's business and soften the hearts of her family towards her.

*Names changed for security reasons

BOLDNESS AND COURAGE IN NIGERIA: MARY'S STORY

Mary shared the good news of Jesus with her captors



Mary was a courageous young woman from Nigeria who boldly shared her faith with Fulani militants after they kidnapped her during a raid on her church. We are sad to report that, shortly after we received her interview, Mary passed away due to surgery-related complications. Mary's family have told us that they wish for her story to be shared so that other young women like her will be seen and heard.

Mary* was only 20 years old when she was kidnapped from her village in northern Nigeria by Fulani militants. They attacked her community during a Sunday church service. "They said if we didn't go with them, they'd kill us," Mary remembered.

Mary and three other women were held in the camp for 54 days. During that time, they were forced to cook for

the militants and suffered repeated sexual violence at the hands of their captors. But despite her situation, she could feel God's presence: "I don't know where it came from – God gave me this strength and boldness."

SHARING JESUS WITH HER CAPTORS

The militants demanded a ransom for the safe return of the women to their homes – but it was a huge amount that the villagers couldn't afford. It's a tactic used to destroy the futures of young people like Mary. If a ransom is paid, there's no longer any money available for schooling. Without the hope of a future, it can be difficult for a young person to stand firm in their faith.

The strength of Mary's faith and her faithfulness in prayer even led her to share the gospel with some of the militants in the camp. Although they weren't receptive, she sowed the seeds of hope for redemption.

Mary's family eventually raised the money to release her. She returned home burdened with the trauma of her experiences: "Every night, I had dreams of

what happened to me in that place. I didn't have peace of mind. I couldn't be around people. The pain wouldn't end."

FINDING PEACE THROUGH TRAUMA CARE

That's when, thanks to your prayers and gifts, Open Doors local partners stepped in with support at the trauma care centre. Mary was able to spend time with trauma counsellors, who helped explain what trauma was and how to respond biblically, helping Mary understand her true identity as God's loved daughter.

"GOD GAVE ME THIS STRENGTH AND BOLDNESS."

"I came to this place to heal," said Mary. "It has really helped my life. I can't thank God enough – for the peace He brings into my life. I really appreciate God for the people He used."

PLEASE PRAY

- For Mary's family and all who are grieving her loss, that they will know God's comfort
- That Mary's courage during her time in captivity and in sharing her story will bear much fruit
- For Open Doors partners as they reach more young people with trauma care and support.

*Name changed for security reasons

Thursday 1 June – Volunteers' Week (UK)

Give thanks for all our volunteers who give their time to serve the persecuted church. Many Christians across the UK and Ireland are still unaware of the plight of our persecuted family. Ask the Lord to raise up more people willing to volunteer their time and skills to raise prayer and action for our persecuted family.

| Burkina Faso

Friday 2 June

Burkina Faso has suffered three military coups since 2014. Large parts of the country remain contested between jihadist groups, ethnic militias and security forces. Amid political turmoil, it is nearly impossible to bring stability. Ask God to give the government wisdom and enable them to create an environment where people can live in safety and be fruitful.

Saturday 3 June

Open Doors recently began providing trauma care to believers in Burkina Faso. Give thanks that it's already having a huge impact. "People here are able to pour out their feelings and simply speak about it," says trauma counsellor, Tirham*. "They are releasing a burden in their hearts. They start smiling and laughing, and are able to sleep better."

Sunday 4 June

Habiba* was kidnapped by jihadists when she was 13 and forcibly married off. After three

years she managed to escape, but still suffers from trauma. Pray for Open Doors partners providing trauma counselling to Habiba and her family, and ask the Holy Spirit to heal and restore them.

Monday 5 June

Christians from Muslim backgrounds experience great pressure from family and community to renounce their faith. Ask God to protect and provide for those who have been rejected for the sake of Christ and pray that they will find new family in the church.

Tuesday 6 June

In the past, Christians in Burkina Faso have had a huge influence in stabilising the country and leading it to independence. Thank the Lord for the presence of the church in Burkina Faso and the great contribution they have made. Pray for continued wisdom and grace to keep up this excellent testimony.

Wednesday 7 June

Pray for wisdom and protection for Open Doors partners serving the church in Burkina Faso through relief aid, persecution survival training, trauma care and spiritual support. Pray that their ministry will strengthen Christians to stand firm in their faith.

| Sub-Saharan Africa

Thursday 8 June – Cameroon

The government puts immense pressure on Christians who speak publicly against injustice

and lack of freedom of religion in the country. Pray that the church will remain active in the political realm and do what is right for the people of Cameroon.

Friday 9 June – Cameroon

Boko Haram operates in the far north of the country. Church activities have been hindered or disrupted and Christian women risk abduction. Pray that the church will find ways to continue to meet and remain strong, influential and resilient despite the challenges they face.

Saturday 10 June – Niger

Converting to Christianity is seen as a betrayal of one's family and society in Niger. Ask God to strengthen and encourage believers from Muslim backgrounds who are under pressure to deny their faith, and help them to find fellowship with other believers.

Sunday 11 June – Niger

Saratu* (18) came to know Jesus after living with a Christian family to enable her to attend school, as there were no schools in her village. When her parents found out, they threatened to disown her unless she married a Muslim. Ask the Lord to strengthen Saratu to stand firm in her faith, and pray that her family will have a change of heart and allow her to return to school.

Monday 12 June – Congo DR

Since 2014, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) have carried out brutal attacks in the east of the country. These attacks are becoming more severe and more frequent.

Pray for a radical change of heart in the perpetrators.

Tuesday 13 June – Congo DR

Pastor Jean (BELOW) was left traumatised after his church was bombed by ADF militants, killing 15 people (see Magazine p18). Thank God that, after receiving trauma care and help to relocate through Open Doors partners, he has found hope and has started leading a congregation again. "The Bible tells us not to be afraid because God is with us," he says. "That is my consolation. Even if we are persecuted, our tears will be wiped."



Wednesday 14 June – Mali

Political instability has left a leadership vacuum that has allowed Islamic extremist groups to expand their territory. This has put Christians at greater risk of violence in parts of the country. Pray that the government will work diligently to restore stability so that people can live in peace.

Thursday 15 June – Mali

Mali has a small but active Christian presence. Thank the Lord for preserving His church, and pray for wisdom for pastors and church leaders as they minister to and lead congregations amid ever-increasing complexities.

*Name changed for security reasons

From persecutor to pastor in Colombia

John is standing up for Jesus against the gangs he used to lead



Growing up in poverty and seeking revenge for the death of his father, John was only 16 when he joined a paramilitary group in Colombia called the Black Eagles. "I never knew my father, I only heard that he had been killed," he says. "So, since I was a child, I listened to stories about how he was killed and that filled my heart with hatred.

"I started committing homicides, collecting extortion money," he recalls. "Later, because I was getting stronger, I had a position as a neighbourhood commander. We persecuted the church because we always saw it as

a threat. We didn't want to see the kids changed, because those are the targets you want to recruit. You see the kids and you look for a way to recruit them. And then the pastor comes and takes them to church. I hated Christians and I used to slander them. I wanted to kill them."

"There are no words to describe the greatness of Jesus."

But God had His hand on John's life long before he met Jesus. "I think because of people's prayers or God's mercy, I

began to feel inside my heart a thirst. I had money, I had fame, I had weapons. But I began to feel a need for a change."

"I HAVE SEEN JESUS TRANSFORM ME"

John was serving a five-year prison sentence when he encountered the gospel through missionaries and came to faith in Jesus. After he was released, John became a pastor and began to experience persecution.

"There are times, for example, when the armed groups say, 'We don't want to see anyone in the street after 6pm or 7pm at night.' It gets complicated for the churches to hold meetings. And in the rural areas, sometimes we cannot preach freely because of the armed groups and also the indigenous communities, because those who have not accepted Christ strongly resist and attack the Christians."

But John is determined to keep serving God, remembering all that Jesus has done in his life. "I have seen Jesus Christ work in me, change me, transform me. There are no words to describe the greatness of Jesus. Amen."

PRAY

- That God will protect Pastor John and his family and bless his ministry
 - For more people inside Colombia's prisons to encounter the gospel and grow in faith
 - That the Open Doors Children's Centre in Colombia will reach more children vulnerable to recruitment by gangs, offering them a place of shelter, education and spiritual care.
- You can watch a video of John at opendoorsuk.org/prayernews

PICTURED We've hidden John's face to protect his identity



| Myanmar

Friday 16 June

It's over two years since the military coup, which has exacerbated Myanmar's long-running civil war. The impact on Christians has been catastrophic, with many targeted because they're mistakenly viewed with suspicion by opposing sides. Pray for the healing of traumatised believers, and that people will see the good deeds of Christians and glorify God (1 Peter 2:12).

Saturday 17 June

At the time of writing, martial law has been imposed in 37 townships, including ones in Christian-majority areas, whilst the country's state of emergency has been increased by six months. This puts believers at greater risk of restriction and attack. Pray for courage and protection.

Sunday 18 June

Open Doors partners are running persecution survival training for Christians. "A believer testified that he had almost lost his faith because of the challenges, but the training helped him renew his faith," says David*. Praise God for this and pray for the renewal of other believers who are struggling.

| Refugees and IDPs

Monday 19 June

Refugee Week begins today and this year's theme is compassion. Last year, at least 140,000 Christians were

displaced from their home or country for faith-related reasons. Pray that believers driven from their homes will encounter people who, like Jesus, are 'moved with compassion' for them (Matthew 20:34).

Tuesday 20 June - Myanmar

Almost 80 per cent of Christians forced from their homes or country last year because of their faith were from Myanmar (110,000). Many are forced to live in forests and jungles. Pray that each displaced Christian will experience God's provision, presence and peace.

Wednesday 21 June - Nigeria

In 2022, around 10,000 Christians were displaced from their homes in Nigeria. Earlier this year, at least 80 believers were left destitute after authorities in Abuja demolished their makeshift shelters without warning. Pray for the provision of safe havens for all displaced Christians in Nigeria.

Thursday 22 June - China

Despite risks and restrictions, Open Doors continues to support North Korean refugees in China through its safehome network. Pray that more people will experience God's love through this key ministry, and that the network will be equipped to meet all needs.

Friday 23 June - Central Asia

When Mihrab* refused to attend a police summons because of the awful treatment he previously experienced under interrogation, he was severely beaten. His family have since fled the country, and

he believes the stress caused his wife, Hadija*, to miscarry. Pray that the family will be led to a place where they can heal and rest.

Saturday 24 June - Central Asia

In 2022, Open Doors local partners provided aid including food, blankets, shoes and medicines to some 7,000 Afghan refugees every week. They also helped the construction of three freshwater wells. Pray that this love shown by the global church will captivate the hearts of locals who don't know Jesus (John 13:35).

| Asia

Sunday 25 June - China

This year, after several years in prison, a handful of Christians were released, but they are still being closely monitored. Ask the Lord to protect and help them as they adjust to life outside prison, and pray that relationships with loved ones will be restored and strengthened.

Monday 26 June - Nepal

Christians are facing increasing hostility from Hindu activists. In one incident, two believers were detained for six hours for street preaching. Elsewhere, two Christians were pressured into burning a Bible in front of a watching crowd. Ask the Lord to embolden believers amid opposition.

Tuesday 27 June - Bangladesh

Sabina is fearful after an influential local man interrupted one of her literacy classes and threatened

her if she used it to teach Christianity. Students are now afraid to attend, so Sabina has started visiting them. The class is greatly impacting the community. Pray that this will continue.

Wednesday 28 June - Indonesia

Since becoming a Christian, Subekti's* transformation has amazed his friends, but his family don't want him at home. He lives on his rickshaw but he's content. "I sit here and wait for passengers while reading the Bible or other discipleship books," he says. Pray that Subekti's rickshaw journeys will lead others to Jesus.

Thursday 29 June - Sri Lanka

In March 2022, Pastor Indunil's* church was attacked by Buddhist extremists. But since then, people have returned to church, faith and prayer have increased, and opposition has softened as believers reach out to forgive. "Many people who stood against us have been coming to us to apologise and reconcile the broken friendships," says the pastor. Praise God for this good news!

Friday 30 June - Vietnam

In the central highlands, two members from the United States Consulate were stopped by locals, including the police, from visiting churches and believers to investigate reports of persecution. Pray that believers will persevere in their faith and that the local authorities will allow churches to operate.

*Names changed for security reasons



COULD YOU LEAD AN OPEN DOORS PRAYER GROUP?

Do you long to go deeper in prayer for your persecuted church family? Do you have a heart to mobilise and motivate others to pray for persecuted Christians living in some of the costliest places to follow Jesus? If you do – could you start a prayer group with some friends in your church or community?

“Now, when I hear their stories, I feel connected with the persecuted church”

Reach out to friends and your local church to join you in praying for persecuted Christians and we'll support you and provide all the resources you need to help fuel your prayer times,

including Prayer News videos, new prayer resources and gatherings with other prayer group leaders.

Sarah runs a prayer group with her husband, Tom. “Before, I would've said that I cared for the persecuted church but didn't have much understanding of their unique situations and struggles,” she says. “Now, when I hear their stories, I feel connected with them. God will ‘take the little in your hands and use it for His glory’, even if only a few people turn up to your group.”

To start an Open Doors prayer group, or to find out more information, call the Inspire team on **01993 460015** or email **inspire@opendoorsuk.org**



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