



PRAYING FOR MIDDLE EAST CHRISTIANS

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“Therefore my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you.” 1Cor 15:58

Having lived under enormous pressure in the first few centuries after Christ's death and resurrection, Christians in the Middle East were briefly in the majority before the last 1500 years when they've been a minority. For much of that time, churches have been divided.

The Arab Spring led to considerable political and economic turbulence. In Egypt, it has also been a time for Christians to come together in unprecedented numbers to pray for their nation. A Council of Churches has emerged, to present a common witness to the regime, and the Bible Societies have played a significant part in communicating God's word to the nation responding to uprising, loss and transition.

Pray for churches to be united in Christ and for unity to spread and undergird Christian witness.

When refugees fled into Jordan and Lebanon, many reacted with resentment. Churches have however been able to see the Lord's hand in these movements; one Pastor we work with says, “Nothing is an accident. God is moving people from area to area, for a purpose.” Having heard and shared the suffering of displaced people, many Christians are moved by compassion to help. Muslims are often disillusioned by what is being done in the name of Islam, and are asking questions as never before. They are coming to faith in Christ and some are coming to churches that help them. Giving practical aid and money does bring real complications, and church and agency leaders need the Lord's wisdom as they respond to so many people in need.

Pray for old hostilities to be broken down and churches to be discerning as they respond.

In recent years many from the region have emigrated to the West, including many Christians; their relatives are tempted to join them. Those who are staying are urging their people to engage with the transitions, and to reach out to the people who are coming in. The leader of the Lebanese Baptist Society, Nabil Costa, says in effect to the West: “We don't want your visas. We want your support to stay in our countries and reach out to those who are coming in the name of Christ.”

Pray many will be convinced to stay and be the salt and light to those of the majority faith.

Under all these pressures, theological training colleges in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt are equipping godly and effective leaders for the churches. The colleges and some of the church networks are preparing for the day when Syrians and Iraqis can return, investing in them for the future of the church in their countries. Give thanks for their vision and energy.

Pray for training institutions preparing and training new leaders, investing in people to build the foundations of churches ready for a new day.

A number of significant church leaders in the Middle East are seeing the present crises as days of opportunity for the gospel. They know doors are open for Christian witness now; they also know pressure on Christians may grow.

Pray God will raise up leaders who are able to see the good things God is doing and hold out the word of life to neighbours and refugees alike. May they not be overwhelmed or exhausted as they deal with waves of people, and may they know the Lord's wisdom and strength.

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