



THE **Voice** OF THE **Martyrs**

January 2022

UNWAVERING WITNESS

A WIDOW'S
PURPOSE

NIGHT RAID
IN IRAN

“THE BIBLES HAVE
CHANGED THEM”



www.persecutionsa.org

“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” Heb 13:3

Remembrance of Family Lost and *Family Gained*

As a new year starts out, you may — as I do — reflect on family members you have lost. If so, you share that with our dear sister Huldah, whose photo graces this month's newsletter cover and whose story is in our newsletter this month.

Huldah's husband, Abraham, was murdered by men who wished to silence his bold witness for Christ in India. Their goal was not achieved, however. After losing her husband, Huldah overcame her fear through prayer, and today she maintains a witness for Christ in the same village where her husband was killed.

Our Lord has provided powerful instruction about family lost and gained. In Mark 10:29–30, He explains that all of us who have lost family members (or possessions) for His sake will “receive a hundredfold now in this time” in return, along with persecutions. We may wonder about this passage, especially when we experience seasons of loneliness, but its truth shines through when we consider it from an eternal perspective. Our families (blood relatives) consist of relationships that are few in number and short-lived compared with those of our **family** (our eternal brothers and sisters in Christ).

As we keep our eyes fixed upon the Lord, we understand that believing family members who have passed away in this world are not truly lost because they are members of our eternal family.

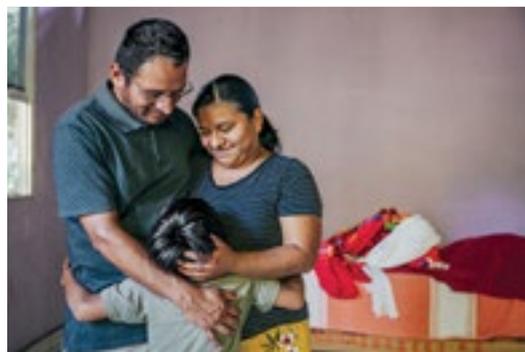
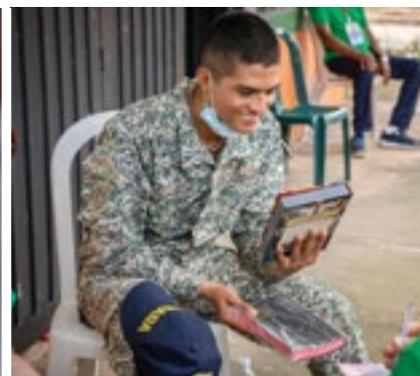
We can also be encouraged by knowing that God's family includes wonderful people from around the world, many of whom you meet each month in this newsletter. Let us, then, encourage one another with testimonies of the wonders of our Christian family in places like India, Laos and China.

As we rejoice and thank God that, by His grace, He has included us in His great family, let us bear witness to its reality for the sake of those who have not yet placed their trust in Him. They can become our brothers and sisters for eternity — and they can do so today. Nothing they have done to harm us or others should hold them back, because our Lord has paid the price for their sins (1 Peter 2:24). Our sister Huldah has given us a clear example of what it means to be Christlike. Like her, we can witness fearlessly in the face of grave danger, even directly to our enemies (Matthew 5:43–44).

In Christ, we are family.

In Mark 10:29–30, after Jesus shares the blessing we receive as members of His family “now in this time,” He goes on to explain that the ultimate blessing we will receive is eternal life “in the age to come.” May our eternal hope in Christ — the fact that we will live forever with Him and with each other — encourage you this new year, and always!

Ashley



The Uneasy Path of Jesus



Huldah grew up in a nominally Christian home in India, rarely attending church and never reading her Bible. Her friends wouldn't have considered her a Christian.

But after experiencing God's protection during a break-in at her sister's house, she decided to pursue a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And along with her renewed faith came a boldness to share Christ with neighbours in her predominantly Hindu village.

Although she encountered opposition from villagers who rejected her message, she knew she must continue sharing the gospel. "From that time onward, I realized that walking in the path of Jesus is not easy," she said. "I had to take some pain and continue to walk in this path."

A Partner in Ministry

As she shared the Gospel, she prayed for a husband who would join her in her ministry work. And after about a year of prayer, a pastor introduced her to a recent Bible college graduate named Abraham.

Before their introduction, the pastor had told Abraham that Huldah would be a good wife for him. "She is the one who will climb all the mountains to share the Gospel," the pastor told him. "Why don't you pray and consider to marry her?"

When the two met, however, Abraham was surprised to learn of a 10-year age difference between them. Still, he felt called to minister in the area and eventually came to see that God had chosen Huldah for him.

Huldah and Abraham married on May 20, 1998, and moved to a nearby village to start serving the Lord together. Abraham received a small monthly stipend from his sending church, and Huldah sold rice in her village to earn extra income. "Life was not easy," she recalled, "but we were surviving for the work of the Lord. This is how God provided for us."

A Brutal Murder

Over time, Huldah and Abraham adopted two children. Abraham continued to serve as a pastor in the area for two

decades, ministering to the poor and marginalized alongside his wife. Several Hindus came to faith in Christ through Abraham's teaching, and he also led several Bible study groups in the surrounding jungle. Abraham raised pigs and farmed to help support his family and ministry.

Then, on the evening of 1 May 2018, Abraham failed to return home from his ministry work at the expected time. When Huldah still hadn't heard from him at 8pm, she began to worry. She had tried to call Abraham, but he didn't answer.

Huldah soon received word from another pastor that the white Jeep Abraham and a driver had taken that day was seen near a local bridge. She sent her son to the location, thinking maybe the vehicle had broken down.

But as the boy approached the bridge on his motorcycle, he saw the vehicle burning; fearing an attack, he returned home. When he told Huldah what he had seen, she felt certain that Abraham was inside the burning car. "All night I cried

“God has given me a vision for this area. I will not go anywhere else. The life is not easy, but I will still continue the work in this area because God has brought me here.”

and prayed,” she recalled. “It was very difficult.”

Early the next morning, Huldah’s brother and her son returned to the bridge, where they saw a body lying next to the vehicle.

“The police came, took the body and helped me understand the things that happened,” Huldah said. Police told her that more than 20 masked Maoist rebels had abducted Abraham and his driver on their way home.

Many Maoists in India belong to a group called the Naxalites, who generally oppose political leaders and the government. Hindu radicals sometimes recruit the Naxalites to pressure or attack influential Christians.

After the Maoists let the driver go, they took Abraham to the bridge and beheaded him, falsely alleging that he was a police informant. Many Christians who knew Abraham think radical Hindus who opposed his work persuaded the Maoists to kill him.

Pastor Abraham was murdered 19 days before his 20th wedding anniversary, leaving Huldah devastated and anxious.

“After the incident, there was a fear in my heart that any moment anyone can come with a gun in the nighttime and they can shoot me,” Huldah said. “I started praying, ‘Lord, give me boldness because Your Word has said that You have not given the spirit of fear.’”

A Time of Blessing

After Abraham’s murder, Huldah’s relatives and others in the village asked her why she wanted to continue living there. “God has given me a vision for this area,” she told them. “I will not go anywhere else. The life is not easy, but I will still continue the work in this area because God has brought me here.”

Huldah stepped in as leader of the church Abraham had pastored, continuing to serve the needs of villagers and others in the surrounding area. She started three new house-churches in the village and continues to share the Gospel throughout the community. She also conducts a weekly Bible study and visits Believers to encourage and disciple them.

She said a hunger for God’s Word is becoming apparent as more villagers

come to Christ. “Last Sunday, this church was completely full,” she said. “So many people came to worship. I always pray to the Lord that He would help me to bless the people of this area.”

As she watches God continue to work through the ministry that she and her husband began, even seeing God use Abraham’s testimony to draw people to Himself, Huldah is hopeful for the future. “When we were together and we were working for the Lord, life was difficult,” she said. “Each day was challenging in the ministry, in the household. But now ... I feel that my days of pain are over and a day of blessing has started.”

Huldah asked that we pray not only for her ministry work but also that her passion for the ministry will remain as strong as it was when she first started sharing the Gospel. Above all, she praises God for all that He has blessed her with and led her through. “God has provided for me,” she said. “God has provided much more than I ever could have imagined.”



◀ Huldah continues the work that she had been doing with Abraham, remaining in the same village where her husband was murdered.

In Prison for Christ

Pastor Li Juncai found favour with authorities as long as his congregation was part of the government-established and controlled church network. But after determining that only God can lead the church, he lost both his church building and his freedom.

Pastor Li Juncai led a large church in China's Henan Province that for years was part of a network of government-controlled churches. He grew increasingly uncomfortable, however, as he realized how much control the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had over the church. The CCP has the right to monitor who attends registered churches and what the pastors preach. They also control when and how the church meets.

The pastor recognized that he and his congregation had to choose loyalty to God over loyalty to the CCP, no matter

how much it might cost them. So in 2013, Pastor Li and his congregation left the CCP-controlled church "to honour the Lord Jesus as the only head of the church." They merged with a local unregistered church and became known as the Yuanyang County Central House-Church. Unregistered churches, sometimes called house churches despite not necessarily meeting in a home and often being made up of hundreds or thousands of congregants, are illegal in China because they do not submit to CCP control via government registration. The

new church led by Pastor Li soon grew to about 700 worshippers.

No Crosses

After a time of church growth and expansion among unregistered churches in the early 2000s, China entered a new era of religious persecution, including a harsh crackdown under Chinese President Xi Jinping.

In 2014, Communist officials launched a campaign to limit Christianity's influence by removing 4,000 crosses from church buildings in Zhejiang Province.



Authorities imprisoned some pastors who resisted, closing or demolishing many churches. And Pastor Li was among those who openly opposed the removal of crosses in Zhejiang, not knowing the campaign would soon spread to Henan Province.

In 2018, China issued new rules regarding religious life and literature, offering financial rewards for information on those practicing Christianity without authorization. Additional regulations required churches to display the Chinese flag, to allow the installation of surveillance equipment inside the church building and to hang pictures of President Xi Jinping in the sanctuary.

The following year, Pastor Li received an official directive. He was ordered to remove the cross from on top of the Yuanyang County Central House Church and to change the church proclamation “Love God and People” to “Love the Country.” Pastor Li saw the order for what it was — a government attempt to replace evangelism with nationalism. Like many other house-church leaders in China, he refused to obey the government’s orders, knowing that he could face severe consequences.

No Compromise

On 20 Feb, 2019, the Chinese Communist Party detained Pastor Li on a charge of “obstructing government administration,” and three other church members also were arrested. The next day, police, urban management officers and authorities from the Yuanyang County religious affairs bureau removed the cross from the top of the church. They also removed the “Love God and People” signs that were inside the church and made Believers raise a Chinese flag in front of the building, signalling the church’s supposed alignment with the Communist Party’s agenda.

Video taken at the scene shows plainclothes policemen and members of the demolition crew gathering outside the church as Christians inside begin to sing hymns and pray. About 10 church members, mostly women and senior citizens, attempted to block the church gate to prevent two large cranes from lifting the cross off the church, but police dragged them away.

In 2013, Pastor Li and his congregation left the CCP-controlled church “to honour the Lord Jesus as the only head of the church.”

As the cross was removed, police used shields to keep Christians from entering the premises, and many who blocked the gate were taken away. “Police took away congregants and beat those who were arrested,” a church member said.

Ten months later, officials returned to the church to finish what they had started. Police, urban management officers and authorities from the religious affairs bureau streamed into the church on 6 Dec, 2019, threatening the more than 500 congregants who had gathered for worship. “Several told us to join a government-controlled church,” a church member said, “but we again refused.”

Then, the Yuanyang Church building was completely demolished. Authorities classified the church as an illegal building even though Believers said they had obtained all licenses required for the

building. “After demolishing the church, governmental officials ordered us to keep what happened secret,” the church member added.

One month after their arrest, the three Believers arrested with Pastor Li were released on bail, but Pastor Li remained in custody, accused of embezzlement, obstruction of government administration and destruction of accounting records. In January 2020, the pastor was sentenced to five and a half years in prison and fined \$7,000 USD.

Pastor Li was sent to the Yuanyang County Detention Center in Xinxiang City, where he is expected to remain until 20 Aug, 2024. The 55-year-old pastor, whose wife died in a car accident in 2012, is responsible for his elderly mother and for his son and daughter-in-law and their two children.



▲ Police removed the cross from the Yuanyang County Central House Church and later destroyed the building.

Happily Going Down the “Wrong Road”



When Duang Ma Nee came to know Christ at age 23, his life was a mess.

“I was drinking a lot and got drunk many times,” he said. “I was always flirting around with women.”

But several of his relatives had placed their faith in Christ, and Duang noticed that their lives had changed for the better. So when his brother-in-law shared the Gospel with him in 2004, Duang placed his faith in Christ.

After becoming a Christian, Duang, who taught school in a Laotian city, stopped getting drunk with members of the board of education. And when board members learned that he had joined a local church, some of them confronted him about his changed behaviour.

“They called me to the office,” Duang said. “They asked me to stop my faith. They told me I was going on the wrong road.”

The board threatened to relocate Duang to a school in a poor, rural part of the school district if he continued following Jesus. But Duang refused

to leave Christ, so he signed papers acknowledging that it was his decision to be transferred.

A New Way of Life

The rough path to his new home and workplace in the rural village required navigating ditches and mud puddles, and getting there took all day. Then, when he arrived, he learned that the village didn’t even have electricity.

At first the villagers welcomed Duang, and a village leader offered him a place to stay until he could find a place of his own. When the leader learned that Duang was a Christian, however, he forced him to move to the student dormitory.

Duang felt abandoned and isolated from his brothers and sisters in Christ in his distant home city, but he didn’t despair. “I did not stop evangelizing,” he said. “I talked with many villagers about Jesus. I felt that God had a plan for me to talk about Him in this area.” Unlike his former neighbours, most of whom worshiped ancestral spirits, the people in Duang’s new village were predominantly

Buddhists.

One day, the opportunity arose for Duang to share Christ with some fifth-grade students. Although he knew he could lose his job for it, he felt that God had moved him to the village to reach people with the Gospel. So he decided to be faithful.

“Whatever happens with my job or my life, I will give it to the Lord,” he thought. “If it is the Lord’s plan for me, then it’s up to Him. I just must keep my faith attached to Him.”

After sharing the Gospel with the students, seven of them chose to follow Jesus. But Duang was crushed when, about a month later, the children’s parents forced them to leave their new faith.

Planting a Church

As Duang continued to build relationships with his students and other villagers over the next two years, some of them gradually began responding to the Gospel. In one case, a man seeking help for his severely ill wife agreed to let Duang pray for her. And when the woman

► After Duang became a Christian, his supervisors exiled him to teach in a small rural village like this one. He later planted a church there.



recovered from her illness, the family placed their faith in Christ. In another case, a man who had been hospitalized several times for stomach ulcers asked Duang to pray for him. When he experienced healing days later, he, too, came to faith in Christ.

Duang soon began to host gatherings in his dormitory room every Thursday, and on Sundays he led an improvised worship service. "I did not know how to conduct a real worship service," he admitted.

Eventually, though, some disapproving neighbours noticed Duang's Christian activities and complained to village leaders. "They told me to stop my faith," he said. "They kept telling me, 'This religion belongs to foreigners. This religion is a disease that is harmful to you.'

"I told them, 'I do not know what to do because I love Jesus and cannot renounce my faith.'"

One day while Duang was away in the city, the school district's dean of academics visited the village and met with village leaders about Duang's evangelism. When Duang returned home,

a village leader informed him that he could no longer evangelize others in the village or conduct worship services in his home.

"I did not listen to them about the evangelism part," Duang said, laughing.

The Lessons of Persecution

Duang has led three more people to Christ since the village leaders ordered him to stop evangelizing and to leave his faith. And, acknowledging that persecution is an expected part of following Jesus, he said he forgives those who have persecuted him.

"I feel sorry for them because they do not understand about God," he said. "I will tell them I forgive them if they come and talk to me again. If they come to Christ, it is even better."

Each time Duang experiences persecution, he gathers for prayer with other Believers. He also reads his Bible and fasts. "The persecution has made me stronger," he said. "It draws me closer to God through prayer, reading the Bible more and in quiet time with Him. In my

heart, it makes me love the Lord even more."

During pandemic restrictions in his village, Duang used YouTube videos to share the Gospel with other villagers. He also distributed Gospel tracts that he acquired through VOM-supported evangelism seminars. For Duang, the global pandemic created a heightened sense of urgency to share the Gospel. And despite ongoing threats and persecution, he said he has never thought about stopping his ministry.

"I want more brothers and sisters in Christ on this earth," he said. "My heart wants this."

Duang requests prayer for his job and for continued strong faith in the face of persecution. For now, he will continue to teach school and share the Gospel at every opportunity, knowing that his faith in Christ could cost him his job at any time.

"If it is the Lord's plan for me to have my teaching job taken away," he said, "I will go into full-time ministry and serve the Lord."

Gracious Father,

*Thank You for our faithful persecuted Christian family members.
I pray for the Believers in this newsletter.*

*Grant Huldah passion for the ministry You have ordained for her.
As she walks boldly, bring fruit from her obedience.*

*Strengthen and encourage Believers. Use the audio Bibles to reveal
Your truth to the people, including all family and friends.*

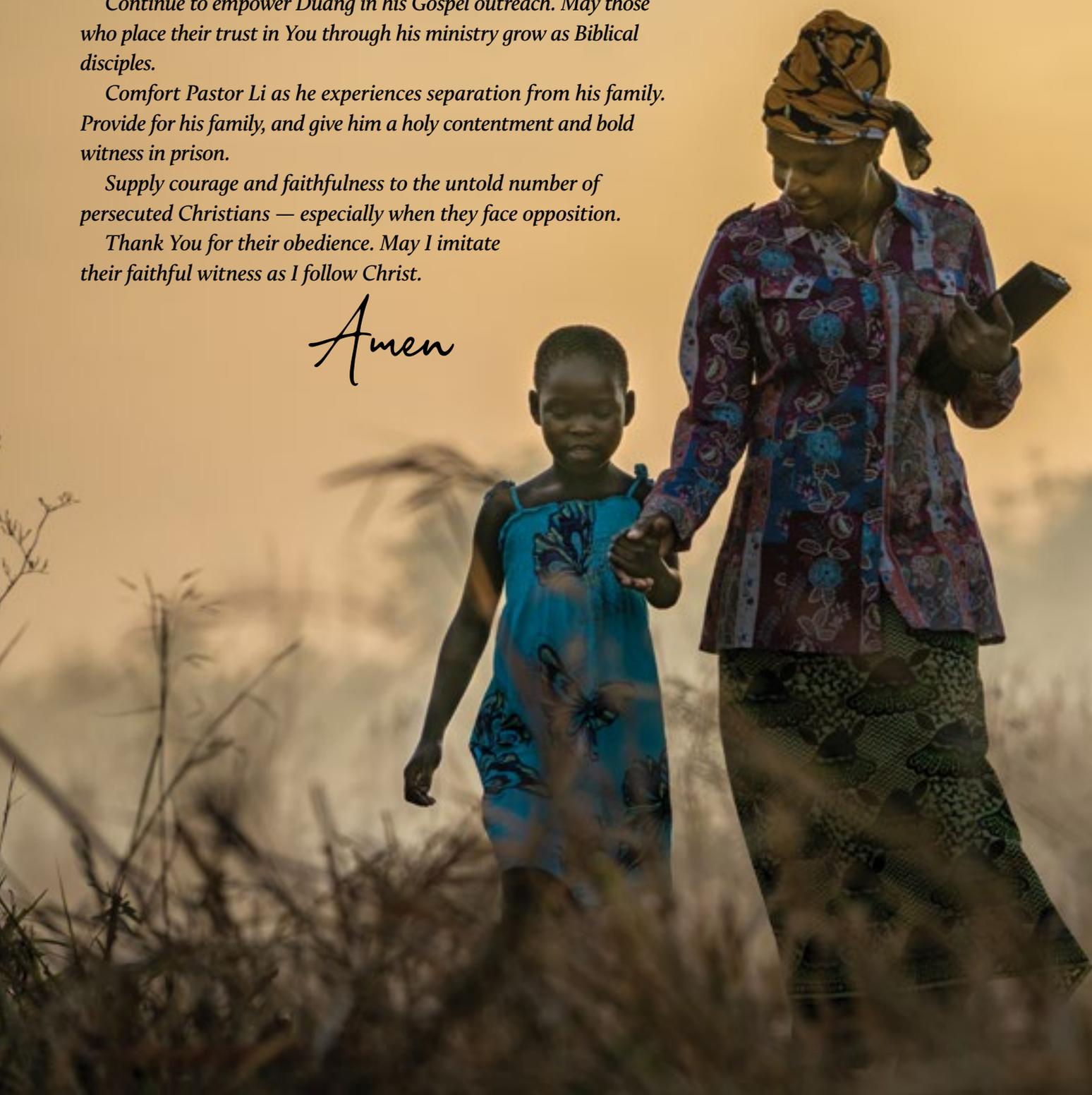
*Continue to empower Duang in his Gospel outreach. May those
who place their trust in You through his ministry grow as Biblical
disciples.*

*Comfort Pastor Li as he experiences separation from his family.
Provide for his family, and give him a holy contentment and bold
witness in prison.*

*Supply courage and faithfulness to the untold number of
persecuted Christians — especially when they face opposition.*

*Thank You for their obedience. May I imitate
their faithful witness as I follow Christ.*

Amen



Prayer Diary[®]

January/February 2022

JANUARY

S 16 SUDAN

M 17 TUNISIA

T 18 INDONESIA

W 19 TURKEY

T 20 UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

F 21 CUBA

S 22 CAMEROON

S 23 SYRIA

M 24 ERITREA

T 25 LAOS

W 26 ALGERIA

T 27 INDIA

F 28 MYANMAR

S 29 COLOMBIA

S 30 MALDIVES

M 31 KYRGYZSTAN

Pray that God will silence the voices of Islamic extremists.

Pray that Bibles will become accessible to every Believer.

Pray that Fenny, the victim of a church bombing, will receive effective medical treatment despite her difficult circumstances.

Pray that new Turkish church leaders will arise to replace deported foreign workers.

Pray for a young woman who was rejected by her family because of her faith in Christ.

Pray for the Believers who will receive Bibles this year.

Pray that Christians in Cameroon will love one another so Christ will be glorified.

Pray for internally displaced Christians in Aleppo and the northwest.

Pray for underground church leaders in Eritrea.

Pray for the wisdom of Front-Line Workers who boldly witness for Christ.

Pray that church leaders will be strong and wise while enduring hardship.

Pray for pastors in southern India who minister to the Banjara tribe.

Pray for Front-Line Workers ministering in dangerous areas.

Pray for a decrease in violence, which has spiked over the last year.

Pray for those working to translate the Bible into Divehi, the Maldivian language.

Pray that Christian families in the north will become missionaries in the south.

FEBRUARY

T 1 BANGLADESH

W 2 TUNISIA

T 3 UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

F 4 SAUDI ARABIA

S 5 MALAYSIA

S 6 LIBYA

M 7 BURKINA FASO

T 8 CHINA

W 9 ISRAEL

T 10 TAJIKISTAN

F 11 MEXICO

S 12 CAMEROON

S 13 CUBA

M 14 CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

T 15 LEBANON

W 16 TURKMENISTAN

T 17 YEMEN

F 18 MYANMAR

S 19 SOMALIA

Pray for Shilpi who was seriously injured when Muslims burned down her house.

Pray for the protection of Tunisian Believers.

Pray for missionaries seeking opportunities to reach Emiratis with the Gospel.

Pray for the encouragement and faith of those who must worship in secret.

Pray that locals and foreigners will work together to engage the unreached.

Pray for new churches that are being established.

Pray that God will change the hearts of Islamists, converting them like the Apostle Paul.

Pray that house-church leaders will know how to shepherd the Lord's sheep in difficult situations.

Pray for Messianic congregations that have been increasingly targeted by anti-missionary groups.

Pray for the training of future Tajik church leaders.

Pray for towns in Chiapas where violence and civil unrest hinder church attendance.

Pray for Christians rebuilding their livelihood after Boko Haram attacks.

Pray that those opposed to the Gospel will be powerless to stop its advance.

Pray that Christians who have been in refugee camps for six years will not lose heart.

Pray for the continued translation of Christian literature used throughout the region.

Pray for Believers trying to return to the country to be witnesses for Christ.

Pray for local fellowships meeting in secret throughout the country.

Thank God that the church in Myanmar continues to stand strong.

Pray for Believers who are isolated and unable to fellowship with other Christians.

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