

sept oct 2017

voice of persecuted christians

release



Pray

173

HELP FREE
ERITREAN
PRISONERS
OF FAITH



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

Do not resist

‘Do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.’

(Matthew 5:39)

Among the most challenging commands from Jesus are these three words in Matthew 5:39: ‘Do not resist’.

They have huge implications for us as believers, most significantly for persecuted Christians in places such as Nigeria where churches, congregations and individuals have been targeted by militants (see page 6), or in Iran where believers have been rounded up by the security forces and imprisoned.

Is Jesus really saying that we are to be punchbags and allow evildoers to do what they like to us — or is there a sense in which He is recommending His followers to take a more clever, subtler approach to confronting evil?

Rather than strike back and escalate the situation, is Jesus urging His disciples to say in effect ‘you can’t really hurt me. Look, here is my other cheek.’

Importantly it also challenges the offender to question why Christians may choose not to retaliate.

What is it that makes us take a hit and not seek revenge? Perhaps Jesus wants us to provoke unbelievers to recognise that a greater belief system exists — one that defies the world’s way of doing things.

That may not be a big issue for us in the ‘free’ world but it is certainly a major question for Christians in Nigeria’s northern states today, and for believers in the

Middle East and churches in China coming under fire from the authorities.

The whole debate over whether Christians defend themselves physically against attacks by militants may determine what happens to the church in Nigeria. So I would encourage you to read our partner Lazarus’s challenging reflection on these verses on page 18.

- Robert de Berry has shown that age is no barrier to helping persecuted Christians (see page 16). To celebrate his 75th birthday the retired vicar cycled more than 900 miles to raise money — an amazing £50,000-plus to date — to help our persecuted brothers and sisters.

I recommend watching a short video of him and his fellow riders crossing the finish line. What an inspiration! We might not all be fit enough to cycle that far, but that should be no block to service. Our office volunteers are faithfully contributing regularly to making sure Release’s ministry continues smoothly. We all have different gifts to offer.

So what can you do? Perhaps it is to join our #Pray173 campaign and commit to pray for Eritrean prisoners for 173 days (see page 10). That too will take stamina

- **Lastly, Colin King will be a familiar face, voice and signature to many of you. After nine years as Release’s UK Director he has made the decision to reduce his working hours and will be fulfilling a different role within the ministry of Release. We want to say a big thank you to Colin for all he has done in helping our readers and supporters understand and engage with our persecuted family around the world.**

Cover photo: Eritrean women at prayer. See page 10 for details of our new Pray173 campaign for Eritrea. Photo: Sami Sallinen/Reuters.

LOVE
KILLS
HATE

See page 18 for a biblical reflection on what ‘Do not resist’ means for believers in the Middle East.

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INTERNATIONAL
voice of persecuted christians

Release helps Christians in the UK and Ireland to actively engage with their persecuted brothers and sisters around the world: praying with them, standing with them, helping them, and learning lessons of true Christian discipleship with them.

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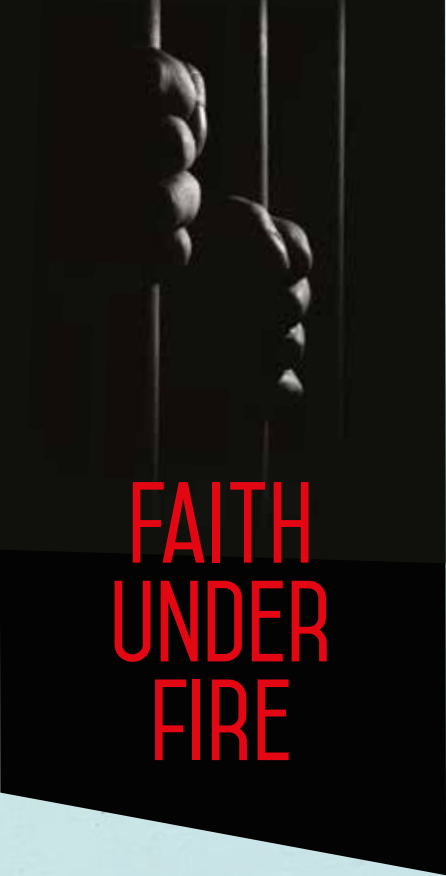
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FAITH UNDER FIRE



Indian Christians beaten and banned from meeting

Christians in eastern India were beaten and abused and, instead of receiving justice, were given an order to stop worshipping.

Hindu women raided Pastor Samuel Karjee's church in Abasing village, Odisha, dragged outside the 12 Christians present and handed them over to a 300-strong mob. The crowd beat them with sticks, kicked and insulted them. Police resolved the issue by closing down the church.

• *Please pray for justice for our brothers and sisters in Abasing village.*

Shocking prison sentences for Iranian believers

An Iranian pastor has paid a high price for refusing to obey official orders about how he should run his church – and has been given a ten-year jail sentence.

A month after his hearing, Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz has learnt he has been declared guilty of 'evangelism', among other charges. Two Christians on trial with him – Amin Afshar Naderi and Hadi Asgari – also face long prison sentences, on charges which included 'acting against national security'.

The three men appeared in court in June – three-and-a-half years after Victor and Amin were arrested at Pastor Victor's house in Tehran province on Boxing Day 2014. Hadi

was arrested last August at a picnic in Firuzkuh, along with Pastor Victor's son Ramiel.

Judge Ahmadpour has now sentenced Victor to ten years' imprisonment, Amin to 15 years and Hadi to ten years plus a two-year travel ban. They planned to appeal.

In a further blow, Pastor Victor's wife, Shamiran Issavi, has now been charged with 'participating in foreign seminars' and 'acting against national security'. Both she and Ramiel are released on bail and are now awaiting trial.

• *Please pray that God's peace will fall afresh on these precious believers and their families.*



Imprisoned Christians (from left):
Amin Afshar Naderi and Hadi Asgari.
Photo: Mohabat News.

Al-Shabaab militants attack Christians in Kenya

The Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab killed 13 people, mostly Christians, in coastal Kenya in July.

Locals in the Pandanguo settlement of Lamu County helped the Islamists identify where the Christians lived, said a survivor of the attack. Several of the victims were beheaded. The assailants killed four people in Kipini and nine in Jima.



Al-Shabaab terrorists have targeted Christians in both Somalia and Kenya.

'The Christians were asked to recite the Islamic dogmas, which they could not, hence they were killed,' a source told the Morning Star news agency.

• *Pray for the families of those killed, and that God will protect His people in coastal Kenya.*

Pakistani Christian jailed after crackdown on cyber blasphemy

Believer Ishfaq Masih was detained in Lahore, Pakistan, in June after a trader accused him of blasphemy following a dispute over a repair bill.

His arrest followed a government campaign during which millions of people received text messages warning them against sharing or uploading 'blasphemous' material.

Since the approval of Pakistan's Cyber Crime Bill in March, the government has reportedly arrested four people accused of posting blasphemous content on websites.

Christian rights activist Napoleon Qayyum commented that anyone can invent a fake social media account and post blasphemous content in another's name.

• *Please pray for the release of Ishfaq Masih.*



Pastor Kholmatov

PASTOR JAILED FOR SINGING TOO LOUDLY IN CHURCH!

At a recent court hearing in Tajikistan, Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov of the Full Gospel Church, Khujand, was accused by one 'witness' of singing too loudly in church and as a result interfering with 'the comfort and rest' of people who live close to the church.

Another alleged that the pastor had given some people copies of Christian books including the *Children's Picture Bible*. Finally, another 'witness' for the prosecution stated that the pastor had asked people to put their faith in Jesus.

Pastor Kholmatov was jailed for three years for 'inciting religious hatred'.

Pray for strength and safety for Pastor Kholmatov and his family, and that he will be a light for Christ in prison.

NIGERIA



Release CEO Paul Robinson interviews Archbishop Ben Kwashi for our latest video (see box). All photos: Andrew Boyd.

'GOD WILL DEFEND US'

While Archbishop Ben Kwashi continues to witness the systematic persecution of Christians in Nigeria, he is confident that God's love will overcome hatred.

In the past 12 months there has been widespread persecution in central and northern Nigeria. Boko Haram terrorists have been uprooting Christians from the northeast. And another wave of persecution has emerged from Fulani Islamists.

The Fulani often attack while villagers are sleeping. In the worst cases, they have killed up to 500 people in one attack, including children. They are wiping out Christian farmers, destroying their harvest and taking over their land and buildings.

What is happening reveals some form of Islamist agenda in Nigeria. Boko Haram and other militants have been recruiting children for their attacks.

Meanwhile the government is doing little to prevent the killing. It has become difficult for us to watch

people being destroyed and families wiped out of history.

So some people have taken up defensive positions. Some Christians are actively protecting churches and areas from attackers.

'If we die, we go to be with Christ. If we live, we live for Christ.'

Given the failure of the government to provide security it is difficult to tell people not to defend themselves. But I have done that. I am afraid an unregimented army may rise, and that would not be good for any country.

Yet I believe that God is able to defend us! In 2,000 years, emperors and nations have risen, wanting to wipe out the Christian faith.

They have all failed. One day this persecution will come to an end.

The days of fear are gone. Jesus has defeated it on the cross of Calvary. If we die, we go to be with Christ. If we live, we live for Christ. The fear of death means nothing.

So there is hope in this nation. Many Christians around the world who love this country are on their knees night and day. I know God will answer our prayers.

Please pray that out of our sufferings will come a Christian faith that will be admired, both on earth and in heaven – a faith that depicts the love of Christ and which is fervent in preaching and living the gospel.

My hope is for a revival that will sweep all of Africa, and then take the gospel back to Europe and America. That's our prayer request. 

• Please join Archbishop Kwashi in praying that the almighty love of Christ will overcome the hatred of Islamist persecutors.

THE ATTACKERS CAME AT NIGHT...

Abednego Solomon and his sister Goodness were attacked by Fulani Islamists. The scars on their faces from the machetes leave you wondering how they could still be alive.

The mental scars are also evident when Abednego speaks. His words are few, hesitant, and delivered quickly, as if to get rid of them.

The herdsmen killed his father and brother, he explains. *'I wanted to run, but they broke my legs. Then they started cutting me with a knife.'*

It was five years ago when the Fulani herders attacked. They came at night. Abednego was ten. Goodness was just five. She

says she can't remember what happened.

She sits forward, scrutinising her fingernails with her one good eye. The other, her right, is cloudy, smaller and immobile. The knife cut runs from the edge of her eyebrow to beneath her red headscarf.

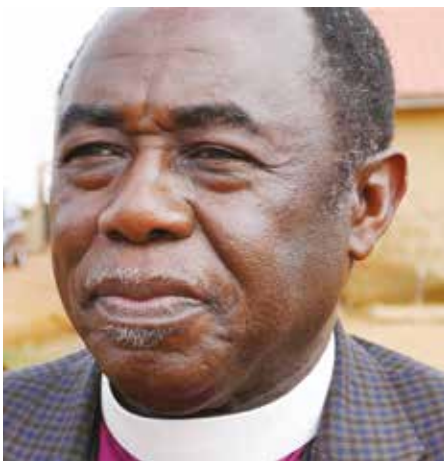
As she sits forward, the slash on her face forms a straight line running from cheek to cheek across the bridge of her nose.



Abednego and his sister Goodness survived the brutal attack by Islamists.

'I want to be a doctor,' says Goodness. 'So I can help people. Please pray for my future.'

Today Christians in Nigeria continue to suffer similar attacks. Please see below for how you can help suffering children such as Abednego and Goodness.



WATCH OUR NEW FILM



Archbishop Ben Kwashi discusses the current situation in northern and central Nigeria with Release CEO Paul Robinson in our latest film *No Fear* (6 min). Watch it now on YouTube at [YouTube/releaseinternational](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=releaseinternational).

WILL YOU HELP BRING HOPE AND HEALING TO PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA?



Your love gift today can help orphans such as Abednego and Goodness (pictured) to receive trauma healing and practical care from our trusted Christian partner in Nigeria.

Your support can provide:

- Bible-based trauma healing for Christian families and orphaned children, helping them to overcome emotional and psychological trauma in a safe and loving environment
- Medical care for the victims of violence
- Support for families who have been forced to flee their homes

Will you show your love for persecuted Christians in Nigeria?

- 1 Give using the attached card
- 2 Give online at releaseinternational.org
- 3 Call: 01689 823491

GENERATE A WAVE OF PRAYER!

The International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church is a unique opportunity for you and your church to join one of the world's largest prayer events and help generate a huge wave of intercession for our persecuted brothers and sisters.

IDOP takes place in the UK and Ireland on Sunday, November 19 – although this year the Religious Liberty Commission, of which Release is a member, is calling on churches, where possible, to dedicate the whole of November to prayer for persecuted believers.

We've prepared a range of resources to help you and your church make the most of this special time.

All of the films shown here are **free to supporters** and include brief topical prayer points – so are ideal for an IDOP service or prayer meeting. Call 01689 823491 or email us at info@releaseinternational.org to request one today.



ERITREA

Our nine-minute video *A Long Way From Home* features the moving testimonies of Eritrean Christians who are now living in refugee camps in northern Ethiopia and shows how your support is helping them today.

ERITREA



If you want to focus on our current Pray173 campaign in support of persecuted Christians in **Eritrea** (see page ten) then please use our new downloadable **PowerPoint presentation** which includes brief background information, a written prayer and prayers for individual prisoners. This is available free of charge from

releaseinternational.org/pray173.

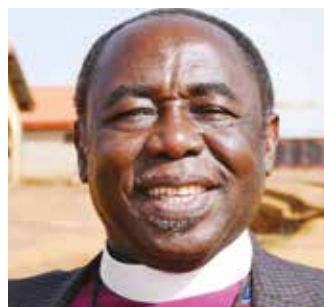
You can also order our nine-minute Eritrea DVD *A Long Way From Home* (see right).

You're also welcome to use any of the other DVDs featured here, which are free to supporters.

All focus on particular nations where Christians face persecution because of their active faith in Jesus. They include brief topical prayer points, and so can be used as part of your IDOP service or prayer meeting.

NIGERIA NEW

Archbishop Ben Kwashi (see page six) shares his insights on current challenges facing believers in northern and central Nigeria in our new 6-minute film *No Fear*, which you can watch at youtube.com/releaseinternational. Includes prayer requests.



LAOS

Rejected for Christ tells the moving stories of three converts in the Buddhist nation of Laos who are remaining strong in their faith, despite opposition and rejection.



EGYPT

Glimmers of Hope (11 min) describes the many pressures facing Christians in Egypt today – and how they are bringing hope to their nation.

HELP GENERATE
A HUGE WAVE OF
INTERCESSION FOR
OUR PERSECUTED
BROTHERS AND
SISTERS



KENYA

The Gathering Storm – Kenya (12 min) reports on how the militant group *al-Shabaab* is now targeting Christians.



TANZANIA

The Gathering Storm – Tanzania (10 min) features the accounts of believers who are experiencing a new wave of attacks by Islamists, partly prompted by the spiritual 'fire' burning in a number of churches.



IRAN/TURKEY

Scattered (10 min) reports on how Christian refugees from Iran have established a thriving church in Turkey and are reaching out to their community. Contains testimonies of church leaders.



IRAQ

Safe Haven? (12 min) tells the story of Thaer and his family who fled Baghdad after suicide bombers targeted their church. Includes three-minute version, ideal for use in a church meeting.

FREE WORLD PRAYER MAP

Attractive A2 colour map with prayer points for different nations.

Supporters can order any of these resources free of charge by calling 01689 823491 or emailing info@releaseinternational.org.

Check out our other informative resources at releaseinternational.org/estore.



HELP FREE ERITREAN

Eritrea today is like one giant prison where hope has disappeared and where the majority of people are denied simple freedoms, basic human dignity and human rights.

Since 2002 the repressive regime has closed all evangelical and Pentecostal churches, and has **imprisoned** thousands of believers.

Please join us in praying for the **immediate release** of all Christian prisoners of faith in Eritrea, including the 173 who have been detained in appalling conditions for more than 10 years.

- Download and sign the Prayer Pledge card from releaseinternational.org/pray173, where you can also find **topical prayers** for individual prisoners.
- Use this same card to call on the Government of Eritrea to release all Christian prisoners of faith. Printed copies of the card are also available. Call: 01689 823491 or email info@releaseinternational.org.



Prisoners of faith have been detained and tortured at Sawa military camp.



Some prisoners have been held underground.

Hundreds of thousands of Eritreans have fled repression, economic collapse and persecution, seeking shelter in the UN refugee camps in northern Ethiopia. Release has supported the ministry of several churches in these camps.



ERITREA

SUDAN

ASMARA

ETHIOPIA



**PASTOR HAILE
NAIZGHI: DETAINED
SINCE 2004**



**PASTOR OQBA :
DETAINED SINCE 2003**



**EVANGELIST MUSSIE
EZAZ: DETAINED
SINCE 2007**



**TWEN THEODROS
DETAINED SINCE**

PRISONERS OF FAITH



President Isaias Afewerki.
Photo: IRIN



The capital Asmara is home to the government of President Isaias Afewerki, which since 2002 has systematically persecuted evangelical and Pentecostal believers. Hundreds have been detained without trial in Asmara's Carshelli prison and in nearby Adi Abieto prison. Since 2002 thousands of evangelicals and others have been held in appalling conditions in dozens of military camps, prisons and detention centres throughout the country.



PRAY FOR ERITREA

- For the immediate release of all Christian prisoners of faith
- For the 173 Christians who have been detained without trial for more than ten years
- For Release partners who support prisoners and their families inside Eritrea, and who minister to Eritrean refugees in the camps in northern Ethiopia

DJIBOUTI

INDIAN OCEAN

Believers have been held at Assab's military prison, with a number reporting torture.



S:
2005



DR KIFLU GEBREMESKEL:
DETAINED SINCE 2004



PASTOR KIDANE WELDOU: **DETAINED SINCE 2005**

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www.releaseinternational.org

Please display this poster in your church to encourage prayer and action for persecuted Christians in Eritrea.

A PRAYER FOR ERITREA

Eritrean refugees pray during a church service in one of the refugee camps in northern Ethiopia

Dear Lord Jesus: You are the First and the Last, who died and came to life again,

Strengthen Your church in Eritrea.

Help us to be united and to show Your love and goodness to our fellow Eritreans, especially to those who persecute us.

We pray for all those who have been arrested, separated from their families and put into prison.

We pray for those believers who have suffered in jail for many years: please heal them, help them, hold them and keep them strong.

In the almighty name of Jesus, let all believers be released!

Grant wisdom and courage to leaders as they serve and teach Your church, both inside Eritrea and in the refugee camps of northern Ethiopia.

For Your glory we pray, **Amen.**

By an Eritrean church leader

HELP STRENGTHEN ERITREAN CHRISTIANS

Please encourage Eritreans who face continuing persecution by making a financial gift.

Your gift can bring help and hope to vulnerable believers suffering inside Eritrea – and to those who have fled as refugees to the camps across the border in northern Ethiopia.

Your prayers and gifts enable our Christian partners to:

- provide food and other essentials to suffering prisoners of faith and their families
- give pastoral and practical support to Christian refugees, including help to set up small businesses so needy families can generate their own income

Your gift will make a vital difference – and will let these precious believers know that they have not been forgotten.

- **Call: 01689 823491**
- **Give online at releaseinternational.org**
- **Use the attached card**

GOOD NEWS

THANKFUL TO GOD – AND TO RELEASE!

Linus is thankful to God – and to Release's partner in Nigeria that he is still alive.

When Boko Haram terrorists attacked his Christian community in the Gwoza area of Borno state, Linus and others were forced to flee to neighbouring Cameroon. *'They killed five of my neighbours,'* he said. *'It was terrible. I didn't expect to survive. Only God saved us.'*

A number of children in the refugee group contracted cholera and died. It was at that point that Release's partner came to their aid, and they were enabled to return to Nigeria.

Hope and strength

Linus now lives at a camp for displaced people run by our partner. Your financial support provides care for Linus and all those currently living there. *'We only find hope in God,'* he said. *'God has been the source of our strength.'*

- Please pray that God will continue to give Linus and other displaced people a future and a hope.



YOUR PRAYERS GOT YURI THROUGH PRISON ORDEAL



Thank you for praying for brother Yuri Pak, a teacher and church leader, who was released from prison in Kazakhstan in June after completing his sentence.

While Yuri was in prison, many of you sent cards of encouragement to support both him and his family.

'Our family is extremely grateful to each one of you for your prayers, words of encouragement and faith,' said Yuri's wife Olga.

'You helped us to go through this difficult trial without losing our faith and courage. We believe that your labour is not in vain before the Lord.'

- Please pray that Yuri adjusts quickly to life outside prison.

HUNGRY FOR GOD'S WORD

When supporter Rebecca led interactive Bible studies for facilitators of our Strength to Stand women's groups in **Egypt** she was amazed at their enthusiastic response.

'Most Bible teachers in the UK would give their eye teeth for such a responsive audience,' she said.

'Their openness to talk about their own ongoing struggles and how God was helping them brought tears to my eyes on many occasions. How very precious these women's faith must be to God!'



PRAY FOR PASTOR YANG HUA

Prominent house church leader Yang Hua has been detained since December 2015 and is suffering poor health, writes his wife Wang Hongwu in this open letter.

Dear friends

Thank you for your concern and prayers from all over the world, given to us at a time when Huoshi Church, Guiyang, is experiencing such a shock, with pastors and church members detained and beaten and our meeting place closed.

My husband, Pastor Yang Hua, was first arrested in December 2015. I personally saw him as he was being transferred to Nanming detention centre, wearing a black hood.

He was formally arrested on charges of 'divulging state secrets' in January 2016 [and sentenced to two and half years in jail in January 2017].

Yang Hua is not in good health. He has high cholesterol, high blood sugar and high blood pressure. He also has a form of inflammatory arthritis and inflammation of the intestine. He has inflammation of the eye, mouth ulcers, neck pain, back pain and chills.

All this makes me worried about my husband's health, and I hope the Lord's grace will lift him up, care for him, and enable him to face the time in prison.

May the Lord's love in this dark, perverse, unjust world manifest in this wonderful way, and may we witness it. Ask the Lord to bless all Christians.

Wang Hongwu

OUR MINISTRY TO PRISONERS OF FAITH IN CHINA

Release provides pastoral care and practical support to Christian prisoners such as Yang Hua through our partner in China. Your prayers and gifts enable us to fund Christian workers who monitor persecution, and who give financial and legal support to prisoners and their families in their time of need.



In March the authorities in Zhejiang province ordered all churches to be fitted with surveillance cameras.

In Ningbo, a city with a significant population of Christians, surveillance cameras are now everywhere, including in many churches. In Wenzhou, however, resistance against them continues.

Many churches have been forced to have cameras installed. Not only has this resulted in damage to property – but church members resisting installations have been wounded in scuffles or taken away by police.

Although the government claims that the cameras will be used to enhance security and prevent acts of terrorism, not everyone is convinced. Armed with sophisticated facial recognition software, Christians are concerned that the cameras will be used to identify individuals for detention.

- Pray for the release of Yang Hua, and that God will bring healing and strength to him.

NIGERIA RUTH'S STORY

Ruth, now 16 years old, was living with her family in Nigeria's northern Borno state when Boko Haram terrorists attacked, she tells Release Potential.

'The Islamists came in the night. They went straight to the church and killed the security man, and then burned down the church,' she told us. 'One man was running for his life, but they got him and killed him. Another man was then killed. They were targeting the strongest Christians.'

The following day she fled for the hills. She lived in caves for 11 months. Women and girls would go out at night to find food (if the men went and were caught they would be killed). However, some of the women were abducted. *'Although Boko Haram sometimes took our food away, we would return later to take it back,' she said.*

Eventually they heard that government soldiers were pushing Boko Haram back, and families began to come down from the mountains. Ruth was found by one of the soldiers and then received help from a Release partner.



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER (IDOP)

November is IDOP month (see page 8) and we would love to speak at your church to inspire youth and young adults to join a movement of believers who will support and act on behalf of our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters worldwide. Please contact us at potential@releaseinternational.org or call: 01689 881974.



We're looking for Change Makers to join our mentoring programme for 2017-18. Are you a student, aged 17-23? Passionate about praying for and serving persecuted Christians? About social justice and transformation? Then please join us! Find out more at: releasepotential.org/change-makers-2017.

FOLLOW US

Twitter Facebook YouTube Releasepotential.org

WHAT A YEAR!

This year so far has been great. We've met lots of you at exhibitions and events. We've helped to lead youth work at Downton Baptist Church's annual weekend away in Bournemouth. Then we've been to the Deep Impact youth conference in Scotland, Big Church Day Out and the UCCF Forum. And we're looking forward to sharing with even more churches about our work: so please email us at potential@releaseinternational.org if you'd like us to visit your church or youth/student group.



ROBERT AND TEAM RAISE £50,000 FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS!

In a spectacular effort, retired vicar Robert de Berry and his team of cyclists completed their 900-mile sponsored ride from Cape Wrath, Scotland, to Peacehaven, East Sussex – raising more than £50,000 for Release and Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

Along the way Robert and others led prayers for persecuted Christians in some 30 churches.

Our thanks go to all the participants, helpers and sponsors for such a fantastic achievement.



Out of Scotland and into England.



Crossing the River Jordan! Near Sevenoaks, Kent.



Robert de Berry (centre): undaunted by his 900-mile cycle ride.



Peacehaven Mayor Brian Gosling presents the team with large gold medals.

**Supporting our
Persecuted
brothers
and sisters
in Christ**



WHAT A GREAT OUTDOORS CHURCH SERVICE!

Many thanks to all the churches that took part in our Great Outdoors Church Service to show their solidarity with persecuted Christians who are often denied access to a place of worship.

‘We wanted to identify with our persecuted brothers and sisters who have no choice but to meet outside due to their buildings being destroyed or access to them being denied,’ said a member of Milford on Sea Baptist Church.

‘There was a very positive response from the church family who gathered for this occasion — and the service itself was given over to considering what Christians in many countries face.’



Milford on Sea Baptist Church was one of the fellowships taking part in this year's Great Outdoors Church Service.

**release
&
your church**



**Invite
a Release speaker
to your church**

To request a speaker for your church or fellowship group, please contact your nearest Development Manager:

Ben

North of England
Tel 07969 361557

Geoff

Central England & Wales
Tel 01234 271855

Kenneth

South of England
Tel 07540 530153

Stephen

Ireland
Tel 028 9334 0014

James

Scotland
Tel 07977 936554

Kate

(Release Women)
Tel 01689 823491

THE WORD

Only the power of the cross, and the indwelling Spirit, enable believers to turn the other cheek towards evil, writes Release partner Rev Lazarus Yeghnazar, President and co-founder of 222 ministries International.



THE IMPOSSIBLE COMMAND?

‘You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.’ Matthew 5:38-39

Israel in the first century may seem a long way from us two thousand years later, but that setting was as full of bitterness, hatred and political intrigue as we see around us today.

The Romans were brutal and merciless in exerting their dominion, and they used ‘betraying’ Jews in the temple – as well as in the tax office – to exercise their control.

There was no freedom – nor human rights.

Against such a backdrop, the long-awaited Messiah was popularly expected to establish Israel as a powerful kingdom, bringing justice and righteousness – and the ousting of all enemies, including the hated Romans.

Yet Messiah Jesus instead asks here for tolerance, mercy, and sacrificial love.

How is this even possible? How can one’s heart be changed to such an extent that it is possible to forgive the perpetrators of evil?

I serve in the Middle East and almost every week have the privilege of hearing first-hand stories of such suffering and sacrifice by Christians. I hear personal accounts from Chaldeans and Assyrians from Mosul,

from Syrian Armenians from Aleppo, as well as new converts from Iran and Afghanistan.

Hadi, an Afghan brother, told me how he was detained in Iran when he was hung upside down and beaten until his knee shattered.

Mahrus, an Iraqi from Baghdad, spent 12 years as a prisoner of war in Iran and was tortured to renounce his faith.

Iranian convert Kurosh was sent to the infamous prison in Shiraz, where

many have been tortured, because he loved Jesus more than his own life.

All of these believers have taken up the cross to follow Jesus.

Today the Middle East is a place where the lavish grace of God from heaven is cutting through the stench of death from the gates of hell!

Only God can change the human heart. And unless God in His mercy changes hearts, evil and destruction will continue.

As the mercy and grace of heaven touch mankind, feelings of revenge turn to forgiveness and love. Despondency and despair change to healing and hope.

The one who suggested the impossible, to turn the other cheek, not only leads us all in the godly example of the cross, but through the indwelling Holy Spirit lives amongst our suffering, washes our wounds and helps us to walk the costly path of forgiveness.

In this way the sweet aroma of Christ destroys the odour of death.

INSPIRING FAITH

‘Jesus taught that when you are slapped you should turn the other cheek. The probable result will be a second and a third slap. I had the experience myself... Jesus told us to walk the extra mile. He never promised that this would give us success in our enterprises, but only that we would become perfect in love. This is enough.’

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1968 he inspired the founding of Release, which today continues his ministry to serve persecuted Christians around the world in the name of Jesus.



Persecuted sisters given a voice at international consultation

Our Release Women ministry recently contributed to an international consultation of 12 organisations in Leuven, Belgium, that highlighted the particular needs of persecuted Christian women.

'Women can face many different types of discrimination due to their faith,' said participant Dr Susan Kerr. 'This can vary in range from exclusion or segregation in different spheres of public life to so-called honour killings, dowry deaths, acid burnings and rape – just because they are women of a particular religion.'

Testimonies from a number of persecuted Christian women were presented by different organisations, including Release. These included reports from a North Korean defector who was abducted by human traffickers and accounts by Egyptian women who daily face the threat of kidnapping and forced conversion.

The consultation also explored how persecuted women, who have little status or power, are often ignored by society.

'Women are silent,' said organiser Kate Ward. 'Culturally, they are not heard. And in the silence, Jesus' church, the bride of Christ, is incomplete without that voice.'

Hear audio reports of the Leuven Consultation by searching for Leuven on our website releaseinternational.org.



Celebrate ten years of ministry to persecuted Christian women

LOVE
—
NEVER FAILS



Saturday, October 7, 2017

10.30am-3.30pm

**St Michael's Church, Chester Square,
LONDON SW1W 9EF**

Admission £10

Join us for a special conference with guest speaker Helen Berhane, Eritrean gospel singer and former prisoner of faith (to be confirmed).

- Come and hear what God has done in the lives of persecuted women over the past ten years. Be inspired!
- Come and find out how you can make a difference as we look ahead to the next ten years. Be challenged!
- Come and pray together for your sisters around the world. Be encouraged!

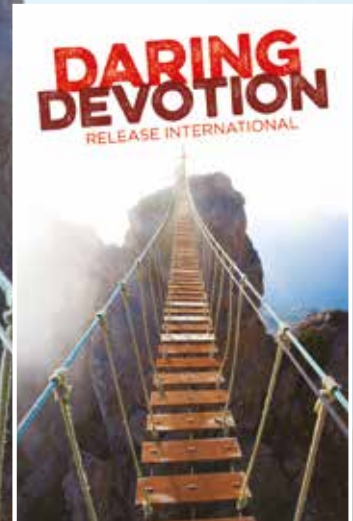
Open to both men and women.

For more details: call 01689 823491 email info@releaseinternational.org for more details.

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Our latest book explores key themes of discipleship through the eyes of persecuted Christians, inspiring us to love more and to trust God more. Ideal for small group discussion. £6 including P&P (or six copies for £30 inc P&P).

Order using
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LEAVE A LEGACY OF LOVE



‘Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5:10)

Remembering those who are persecuted in your Will is vital to help Release International continue supporting Christian families in need worldwide.

If you are thinking about making or updating your Will, please contact Paul Jones to request our legacy brochure, or to discuss how your legacy could be used.

Telephone:
01689 823491 or email:
pjones@releaseinternational.org

*Persecuted Sudanese Christians
receive Bibles in their own language.*