A photograph of a man with a beard and a white cap looking at a young boy in a blue shirt who is smiling. They are outdoors, with colorful prayer flags in the background.

26 MAY – 25 JUNE, 2017

**PRAYING WITH FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE
FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD**

**30 DAYS
OF PRAYER**

FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Praying Friends,

Last year, we estimate that we had one million Christians around the world using the *30 Days of Prayer* guide to pray for Muslims during Ramadan!

When 30 Days began, it was a small group of people who believed that God was challenging them to look at the Muslim world through the eyes of a loving Father and see them as He does. We are greatly encouraged by the feedback we receive from participants around the world, who tell us how praying through *30 Days* changes their understanding of Muslim people and helps them have an attitude towards Muslims that is a better reflection of the heart of Christ.

It can be challenging to hold a clear perspective on Muslims at a time when Islamic extremist groups dominate global news. So we decided to focus this edition on a part of life that we are all connected to in one way or another: family.

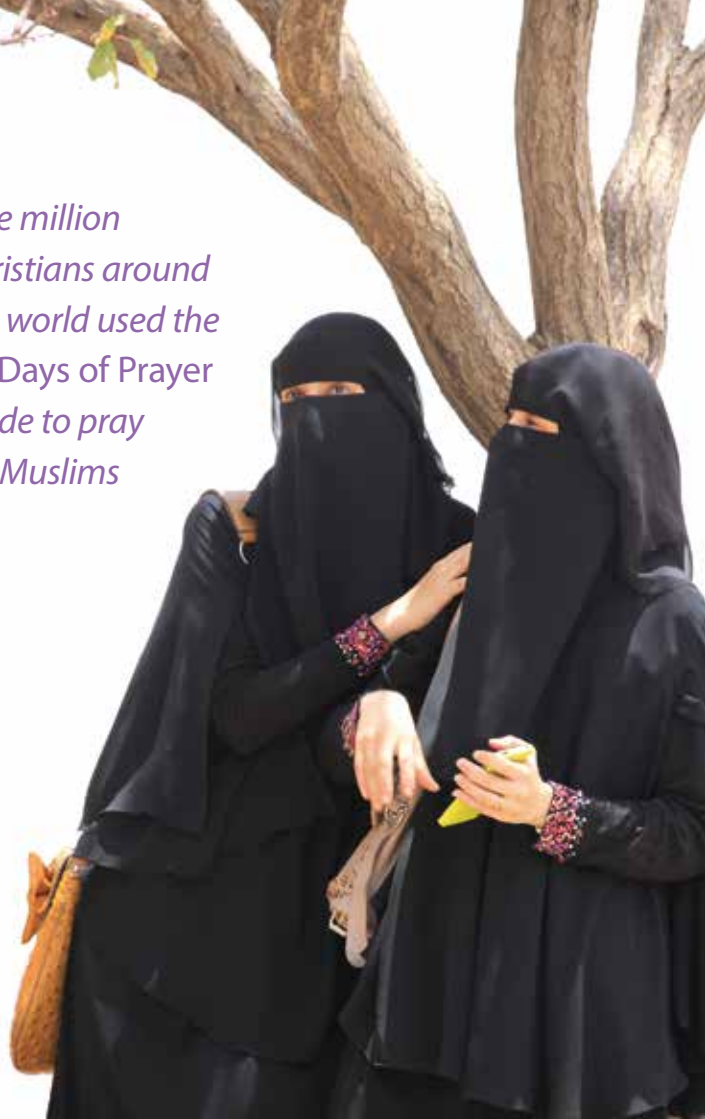
In this edition, we aim to focus our prayers on family life—the place where most people first learn about faith, where our values are formed and where we are influenced in more ways than we realise. We hope that you will learn how different Muslim cultures express different family traditions and also see what you have in common with Muslim families, and that both of these will inform your prayers and help us to share the wonderful message from 1 John 3:

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”

Thank you for praying,

The Editors, *30 Days International*

*One million
Christians around
the world used the
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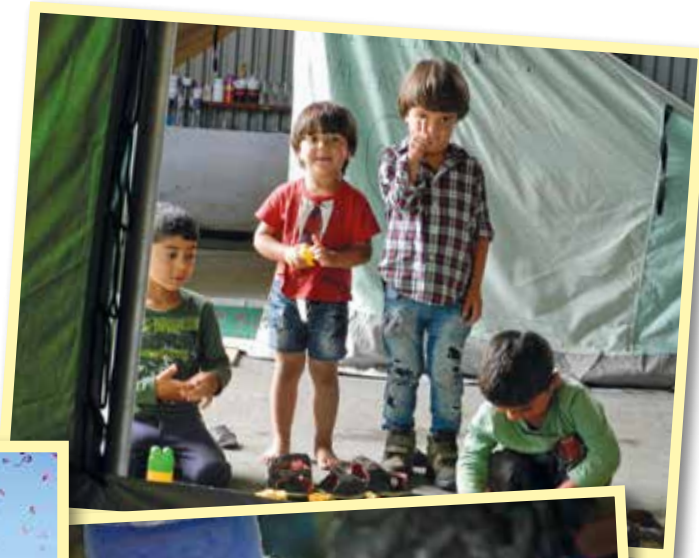


WELCOME

Is this your first time participating in *30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World*? Or are you one of our readers who have been praying since we began in 1993? Or did you join when we started producing the guide in a new language somewhere along the way?

30 Days of Prayer now includes Christians from all over the world praying in over 30 languages—including some of the most widely spoken and some of the more obscure. Our aim is to bring all of you together for the 30 days of Ramadan to focus your prayers on blessing Muslim people. We want this guide to help followers of Christ see some of the diversity in the Muslim world and learn about the needs of Muslim families across the globe, so that you can pray with a heart of understanding that leads to greater awareness of God's love for Muslims. In a world that is increasingly in conflict, we believe that prayer is an action that can bring peace, change communities and draw the kingdom of God closer to earth.

This year in *30 Days* we are particularly praying for families. Our writers are from all over the world and they will share stories, needs and concerns from families in the Muslim cultures and sub-cultures where they live. All families are different, but we think you'll find that you have things in common with the people you will read about in this edition of *30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World*.



WHERE WE ARE PRAYING

The numbers on the map indicate the page numbers of various articles



Information

Praying for Muslim families

Family is complicated. Our family life greatly determines who we are and is determined by so many factors. No family is the same, and when we explore family life in the Muslim world we will see both the differences and the similarities.

In this edition, we will reflect on the diversity that exists in Muslim families. Just as they do within Christian families, so culture, tradition, education, experience and opportunities all influence the way Muslim families operate around the world. Families respond and adapt, generation after generation, to the rapid and slow changes of culture, society and technology. We'll learn how this is having an impact on Muslim families in different locations.

You will also see how some things are universal: the sacrifices made by a parent so that a beloved child can have better opportunities; the worries for growing children engaging with an increasingly unpredictable society; the shared joys and burdens of a married couple; the concerns for ageing parents. We can pray with understanding for familiar issues.

Families respond and adapt, generation after generation, to the rapid and slow changes of culture, society and technology



Information

What does Islam teach about family life?

Islam teaches that “The best of you is the best to his family,” affirming that how one behaves within one’s family is evidence of true religion. Parents are exhorted to carefully raise their children; spouses are charged to be loving and faithful to one another; and adult children are expected to honour and provide for their elderly parents.

Around the world, culture and faith have influenced one another. Muslim families may or may not reflect traditional Islamic teaching regarding the roles for family life, which emphasise the man as a provider and the woman as responsible for the home and children. Different Islamic traditions and interpretations exist, and while in some parts of the world you will find Muslim families living just as they did hundreds of years ago, in other places Muslim family life has kept pace with the rest of society or is rapidly changing.

Faith shapes our view of family, and family shapes our view of faith.

This edition of *30 Days of Prayer* aims to let the love of God for Muslim people direct your prayers for Muslim families and encourage you and your family to reflect that love to those around you.



A family fasts

I remember the first day that I started fasting. I was only about seven years old but I was excited to be treated like an adult. Ramadan was during the school holidays that year, so it meant I could sleep during the day if I needed to. Mum woke me at 3am to have breakfast before sunrise. We ate yoghurt and a spicy omelette with chapatis and drank lots of chai.

As the sun was rising, we prayed the first prayer of the day together, side by side, my mum and I. I somehow felt more connected with her that day than ever before or since.

Then we went back to bed and the fast had started. For the rest of the day we played and I helped my mum cook food for the *Iftar* meal at sunset.



I looked forward to the days when we sat altogether around the blanket laid on the floor with all my favourite dishes that were only cooked during this special time. This was the only time all ten of us ate together:

it felt like a feast that connected us and it made me feel that we were a real family. On a Friday, my father would invite some of his friends to eat *Iftar* with him and then the men would sit and eat in the other room, and we women would have to wait for them to finish before we could eat after a long day of fasting.

During this month, the house was quieter during the day — we were often too tired and hungry to talk to each other. We would often be praying, reading the Qur'an or sleeping and watching TV. There was more

tension during the day also, especially as we grew more tired as the weeks wore on. But we were all in our own quiet ways seeking to do what was right before God, do our duty and seek His blessings during this month more than at any other time in the year.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- For those who are cooking meals even though they are fasting — that as they prepare food they will have a revelation of Jesus as the Bread of life.
- For families to meet Jesus in this month as they eat and pray together — that they will know Him as the One who gives living water so they will never thirst again.
- For peace in families and between family members as they look to God for blessings.

I somehow felt more connected with her that day than ever before or since

The Andalous of Zaghouan, Tunisia

The mountain town of Zaghouan is situated 45 miles south of Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. The majority of the 40,000 people settled in this area trace their ancestry to the Muslims of Andalusia who were forced to flee by the Spanish during the expulsion of Muslims during the 17th century: it surprises some to know that Islam was widespread in Spain for nine centuries.

Taxi drivers, shopkeepers and mothers with their children are quick to tell you about their proud history. They tell of their escape to Zaghouan, with their most precious

treasures hidden in small, round, white sweets, so as not to be robbed on their arduous journey. Zaghouan is now famous for its small, round pastries called *kaak warka*, made of dough and almonds mixed with rose water.

Zaghouan is a popular sightseeing spot for Tunisians. Visitors can stumble over the most magnificent Roman ruins. The mountain is wooded and beautiful, and often snow-capped in winter. Foreigners also used to visit this area but since the terrorist attacks in 2015, tourism in Tunisia has suffered badly, with many hotels closing. Locals are worried about tourists not returning. Since the revolution of 2011 many Tunisians are unsure what to make of their new place in the world, and distrustful of their new government.

During the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, an 82-mile aqueduct was built to supply water from Zaghouan to the city of Carthage. The Water Temple still stands majestically on the hillside where the spring, now mostly dry,

once emerged — a reminder of the spiritual significance water was given in this dry land. Recently, a prayer team visited this area and prayed that once again life would spring from Zaghouan, and that this dry and barren land would find its hope in the “source of everlasting life”.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray that those who have lost livelihoods as a result of the downturn in tourism will find other ways to support their families.
- Pray for stability and peace in Tunisia and for wise leadership.
- Pray for streams of living water to flow to and from Zaghouan, as Jesus described in John 4.

Since the revolution of 2011 many Tunisians are unsure what to make of their new place in the world



Multicultural North America

“I love America!” shouts Fatima as the crossing guard escorts her children safely across the street as they walk home from school — a school in which the students speak over 40 different languages.

Fatima works nights, cleaning toilets at Chicago’s O’Hare International airport. Her husband Muhammad works days in a huge chicken factory, where the refrigerator-like temperature chills him to the bone. Neither receive government benefits. They live in a dreary basement flat. I’ve asked Fatima how she can shout out her love for America while working and living in such conditions. Then I heard her story: seeing her father and brother killed, being shot herself, and then years in a refugee camp with her family waiting to enter the United States of America. She says that for her, America is a paradise, a land of opportunity where she can raise her children in safety.

The nations are still coming to North America. There are over five million foreign-born residents in metropolitan New York. Half of Toronto’s residents were not born in Canada. And it’s not just the largest cities. The fastest-growing concentration of immigrants in North America is in midsize cities, such as Nashville, which had the fastest-growing immigrant population of any

American city in 2012 and is the home of the USA’s largest Kurdish population.

In Fatima’s Chicago neighbourhood, there are Muslims from South and Central Asia, many African countries, Malaysia, Indonesia and every country in the Middle East. The shops, the aroma of spices, and the restaurants on many streets make you feel as if you are in Kolkata or Karachi. You see men streaming to the many mosques at prayer times. Most Muslims are warm and hospitable when Americans welcome and greet them, and meaningful friendships develop for those who consistently get together with them.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Multiculturalism is both a blessing and a challenge. Pray for the peaceful integration of people from many lands in North America.
- For American believers and churches to realise the opportunity that exists to share Christ’s love with their Muslim neighbours, and to step out and do so.
- For strength, funds, and unity for churches, non-governmental organisations, and individual missionaries already working with Muslims in US cities.



Most Muslims are warm and hospitable when Americans welcome and greet them

A look at shame and honour culture

I grew up in a Muslim community that was managed by shame and honour, and I learned as a small child that I should avoid behaviour that caused the women in the community to gossip about me. One day, I overheard a group of “aunties” talking about an acquaintance who had been allowed to go to university, where she got her hair cut and married a man without her parents’ knowledge. I thought he must have been a non-Muslim based on their reaction, but the conversation went on to describe the man as an Arab Muslim with a law degree. I was confused by this gossip and the shame that it brought on that family.

Izzat (honour) and *sharm* (shame) are becoming familiar concepts even in cultures that don’t practise them because of media coverage of honour-based crimes. Westerners who work cross-culturally with Muslim people will often hear the words honour and shame but they don’t always fully understand what they mean. Shame and honour is the way many societies control the behaviour of children and adults in the Muslim world. The application of shame or honour is decided by leaders of a tribal or religious community and pushes people to conform to accepted behaviour.

This happens in non-Muslim cultures,

too. In the West, the use of laws makes people feel guilty, and certain criminals are ostracised by their communities. We do this to protect ourselves against negative impacts on society. But Jesus’ message is that God has the power and desire to elevate us all from a lowly position to a place of great honour (Matthew 5:3). This is good news for those who live in shame-based cultures.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- In 1 Samuel 2:8, it says, “[God] raises the poor from the dust and lifts up the beggars from the dung hill; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour.” Pray for revelation about this good news in cultures where it is not known.
- Ask God for revelation in your own understanding about shame and honour and how you can reflect the God who says, “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” (1 Peter 2:6)
- Pray for those near to you who are appealing for justice for the victims of honour-based crimes.

Jesus’ message is that God has the power and desire to elevate us all from a lowly position to a place of great honour



Comoros: matrilineality — blessing or curse?



Often, men will be unfamiliar with the habits and customs of their new clan and do not feel comfortable in the new home

The Comoros Islands are a volcanic archipelago off the eastern coast of Africa between Mozambique and Madagascar.

They cover only 640 square miles and have a population of around 800,000, making it small but densely populated. Ninety-eight per cent of the population are Muslim but — unusually for a Muslim society — many follow the custom of matrilineality.

Matrilineality is a Latin word meaning “in the line of the mother”, and it refers to the distribution and inheritance of property through the female line from mothers to daughters. On the Comoros Islands the houses belong to women. When a daughter marries the house will be passed on or else another palm hut will be built in the courtyard.

Men who marry move into the house of their wives and join their clan. Often, men will be unfamiliar with the habits and customs of their new clan and do not feel comfortable in the new home. Unemployment is high in the Comoros, and often men end up spending time playing cards or working in the fields.

Rashma tells a common story: “My biological father abandoned us when I was a small child, so my mother got married for a second time. My stepfather came two or three times a week to eat or sleep. Otherwise,

he was either at his original family or with his second wife.”

“I was lucky that my stepfather treated me like my half-sisters. From my mother, I learned different things in the daily business of housekeeping, cultural customs and how I can protect myself from evil spirits. Nevertheless, I live in fear of curses that could be imposed on our family.”

“I yearn for a responsible husband, who will be a good father to my children, and that we’ll stay under the protection and blessing of God.”

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- The Comoros Islands are one of the poorest countries in the world. With a high fertility rate, feeding a large family is a daily struggle for many.
- Healthcare and education are only minimally available. Less than half of children attend school, and there are few doctors to care for the needs of the population. Pray for these basic needs to be met.
- For the tiny Christian population (less than 2 per cent) to take the lead in addressing some of the needs of the Comoros and be a light and blessing to the islands.

Lebanon: the church as a family for refugees

The war in Syria triggered a massive wave of refugees, who are mainly accommodated in surrounding countries. Prior to this, in 2014, conflict flared up in Iraq, also creating hundreds of thousands of new refugees. Many of these refugees have fled to Lebanon, where Lebanese churches have dedicated themselves to caring for them — changing themselves in the process.

One church in Lebanon has had 300 Syrian refugees and 300 Iraqi refugees join their 200 Lebanese members in recent years. Entire refugee families and those who have lost all or part of their family have found a new home in this church. They are being helped on different levels. Food vouchers and medicine make physical survival possible in their difficult situations. Counselling and small groups help refugees with processing their trauma. Church services and training provide spiritual growth for those who follow Jesus already or are thinking about it.

Last year, this church focused on the idea of “family”. Fleeing for their lives and losing homes and jobs has changed family dynamics drastically for many refugees. Marriage courses and retreats have proved helpful in addressing the impact of this on married couples. The importance of family

for the individual, the church and society has been emphasised and further deepened in church services and small groups. Their goal was to develop healthy families in which people can thrive, and that are a witness and blessing to those around them.

Many of the refugees have found spiritual siblings in the local churches of Lebanon, and this is helping them to adapt to the changes forced upon them and to have the motivation to move forward in their new lives.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- For the many refugees who are still in difficult and often hopeless situations, with desperate physical, emotional and spiritual needs.
- For the featured church and others like it that are serving and welcoming refugees – that their efforts will multiply and be blessed.
- For refugees in Lebanon who are on the long road to rebuilding their lives, for a future filled with hope for their families.



Fleeing for their lives and losing homes and jobs has changed family dynamics drastically for many refugees

What concerns Muslim parents?



My friend Razia is a support worker at a centre for Asian women in the United Kingdom. She cares deeply for the women she works with, many of whom come from the same Pakistani Muslim background as she does. Recently, she was telling me of the concerns some of her clients have because they don't understand computers as well as their kids and therefore don't know what they are getting up to online — who they are meeting and what information they are sharing. I have heard the same concerns from Christian parents: it is one example of the many similarities that exist between the concerns of Muslim and Christian parents.

But there are some real differences too.

One concern for many Muslim families, particularly in non-majority Muslim nations, is how do they give their children a positive view of Islam when the actions of terrorists create stereotypes that equate all Muslims with violence? Since the Syrian civil war began, over 3,000 of the foreign nationals who have made their way to Syria and Iraq to fight for various radical Islamist factions are from Western countries. Most of them left in secret, leaving their parents to deal with grief and sorrow at the loss of a child, and guilt at what he or she may have done. They feel shame in the face of hostility from friends

and neighbours, and they are left with doubt about all the things they realise they did not know about the person they brought into the world. What they want, more than anything, is to make sense of what happened to their children and what they have done.

Most faithful Muslim parents hope for their children to grow up to be faithful Muslims, marry well, have successful jobs and raise a family of their own. Those living outside Muslim nations also hope their children will learn to successfully balance life as Muslims with life in a secular society. Perhaps that is not so hard for Christians to relate to after all.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- For Muslim families that you know — for strong relationships and blessings on their family.
- For parents who are dealing with the grief of losing a child to extremism — for comfort and peace.
- For Muslim parents engaged in the challenging task of raising children in a culture different to their own to have wisdom, and for churches and groups who are providing support to parents in your own location.

Muslims: a minority in India

Sahil was thrilled to receive a book titled *Words of Love* from his favourite radio station in India. The book introduced him to the idea of God's love and forgiveness. Soon after, he met Abdul, a follower of *Isa* (Jesus), who told Sahil more about His message. That day changed Sahil's life forever. He gladly embraced the words of *Isa* and received His salvation.

Sahil went home and told his family about what he had learned, expecting them to be as excited as he was. Instead his father told him that this teaching was not for Muslims. When Sahil did not agree he was thrown out of his family. He stayed with a friend for a few years and began sharing what he learned about *Isa* with other Muslims.

Fourteen years later, Sahil is still speaking of *Isa* to other Indian Muslims and finds them to be very open, just as he was. However, there are few people willing to engage with the Muslim community in India. Many Hindus, Christians and other religious groups are suspicious of Muslims in India, even though they make up the second largest religious group in the country and the third largest Muslim population in the world!

For Sahil, it is heart-breaking that many Christian communities avoid working with Muslims in India. He laments, "... if only Christians will take the time to get to know Muslims, they would find that they are a hospitable and friendly people."

Sahil wonders if misconceptions about Islam cause fear: "Some people assume most Indian Muslim men have more than one wife, but most Muslim families are not polygamous," says Sahil. "They are like every other family in India. Their concerns are just like everyone's concerns."

Though very diverse ethnically, linguistically and in their practice of Islam,



Muslims in India are very loyal to that part of their identity. "For Muslims in India, Islam is their religion, but 'Muslim' is their identity as a community," says Sahil. This can be a challenge for those who want to learn about following *Isa*, though many are still choosing to do so within the Muslim community.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- For more Indian Christians to make the effort to get to know Muslims in their nation.
- For peace in India, a legally secular nation, among and between the different faith communities.
- For Muslim families in India facing the challenges of living in a minority community, and for Christians to be fearless in living the love of Jesus.

"For Muslims in India, Islam is their religion, but 'Muslim' is their identity as a community"

Afghans of North America

Since the 1970s Afghans have been leaving Afghanistan in search of safety, stability, or opportunities for their families. One region in North America is home to more than 60,000 Afghan immigrants and refugees. The needs in this community are vast: from access to housing, language learning, and job skills to chronic illness, safety for women from domestic violence, and healing from the generational trauma of war.

Afghan families first started coming to this area in the late 1970s during the war with Russia. These families were well-educated, secular Muslims, and often leaders in their fields. Their children grew up in the United States of America and many have gone to university and have assimilated to Western culture. The second wave of refugees came after the 9/11 attack and were primarily widows and children. They faced multiple challenges, as they often spoke little English, had little-to-no-formal education, and had minimal financial resources. The third wave of Afghans, which continues today, is made up of translators who assisted the US government in the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan and are now seeking asylum. They need relevant job training, and some need mental health treatment to address the

trauma they have endured.

These families all have a common need both for familiar community (which they often find at the mosque or in Afghan shopping markets) and for acceptance and integration with the broader community. Due to decades of war and tribalism, trust is a huge issue in the Afghan community; ironically this propels some to engage with their Western neighbours.

One way some of these needs are being addressed is through church partnerships with local Afghan agencies. Miriam works at one of these agencies and cares deeply about her people. She is relentless in trying to partner with anyone to support her in her vision of offering tutoring, job-skills training, and domestic-violence support groups to her community. Currently, she is working with a Christian in projects to help Afghan women heal from trauma and abuse. Together they are seeking God's healing in the lives of these women. It is their hope that as generational patterns of violence are transformed, peace and healing will come to Afghan families.

Find out more at:
northamericanafghans@gmail.com



HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- For healing from trauma for Afghani war victims.
- For local churches to extend hospitality and resources to the Afghan community.
- For transformation in marriages and support for those who want freedom from violence.

These families all have a common need both for familiar community, as well as acceptance and integration with the broader community

Family in Yemen: where tradition prevails

There are only a few countries in the world that have a form of family as traditional as the one that still exists in Yemen. The poorest Arab nation with a distinctive tribal culture and a long Islamic history, family culture in Yemen is very conservative. The effect of this is seen most clearly in the customs surrounding marriage. Most marriages are arranged — the bride and groom know very little about each other before the wedding day. In rural areas, women often marry at a very young age and a man is permitted to have up to four wives. Male and female roles are allocated very strictly in both family and society, to the extent that even weddings are celebrated in two locations — one for the men, another for the women.

Even though this culture places burdens and pressure on the men, it is even more limiting for women, who often have very difficult lives. Very few women show their face in public, and the overwhelming majority wear the black *abaya* (robe-like dress) and cover their face in public. Many girls do not go to school and are unable to read or write. Their destiny is to marry, raise children and take care of the house. In the dry mountain villages of Yemen, this means a lot of work, including carrying full cans of

water up a mountain several times a day.

Yemen is almost completely unreachable by the gospel. Only a very small underground church exists. For local Christians, it is very challenging to be a witness and a light for Jesus in this darkness of such a conservative Islamic context.

Even though this culture places burdens and pressure on the men, it is even more limiting for women

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- For the nation of Yemen as it faces incredible political instability and many suffer from the impact of war, terrorism and poverty.
- That Yemeni culture will awaken to understand the value of women, to protect them and give them opportunities to live joyful, abundant lives.
- For the few Christians in Yemen to be encouraged in their faith and be a witness and example in their families and communities.



What about terrorism?

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

Today, fear is the spirit of this age: fear of terrorism! Fear of Muslims! Fear of the future! Islamophobia is an accusation thrown at anyone who criticises Islam and Islamic regimes. Some people think that Islamophobia is unwarranted. On the other hand, Muslims claim that Islam is a peaceful religion and the terrorists are hijacking it. But the perception of Islam as a peaceful religion has been shattered by the reality of Islamic extremist attacks.



As we watch terror attacks unfolding in the news, what we see are the works of the evil one. Terrorism, murder and injustice create in us a spirit of anger for the innocent loss of life. But Jesus says, be angry and do not sin. Does my anger lead me to action? Am I willing to share the gospel of Christ that changes lives?

After the attacks in New York on 11 September 2001, a young Christian in America took a step of courage despite his anger and fear. He began a conversation with a Muslim colleague, which led to a friendship, which in turn led to sharing the gospel of Christ. This is what Jesus calls us to as His followers.

The Bible admonishes us not to be afraid. God has given us the Spirit of power to overcome fear, the Spirit of love to show compassion to our Muslim neighbour. If we believe that Jesus is the hope for our planet today, we believe He can change the hearts of even terrorists. The gospel is the new ideology that creates peace.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you have adopted the spirit of fear rather than the Spirit of love regarding Muslims.
- Pray for the Spirit of God to overcome your fear and enable you to show His love to Muslims around you.
- Pray for those who are involved in terrorism, that Jesus will reveal Himself to them and they will be transformed.

If we believe that Jesus is the hope for our planet today, we believe he can change the hearts of even terrorists

I want to get married!

Xiaoma was a 19-year-old Hui Muslim living in northern China. Most young Hui men are expected to get married at this age, but Xiaoma faced a dilemma: how would he pay for the dowry? His family owned a small ethnic food store selling white cakes at ¥0.80 yuan (10p) per loaf. He wondered how many loaves he would have to sell to satisfy his bride's dowry.

Xiaoma's father initiated the proposal on his behalf. The bride's family asked for ¥50,000. That meant selling 62,500 white cakes! According to custom, he also needed to provide "three gold, one auto!" — a set of gold earrings, necklace and bracelets, plus a car. Years ago, a motorcycle was the expected gift, now it was a car! In addition, a Chinese Muslim wedding banquet lasts for three days with all food and drinks provided! The total of dowry and wedding expenses was more than ¥100,000! Xiaoma thought he would be unable to marry.

Before long, however, Xiaoma announced his wedding date. I went to visit him. Seeing his relatives and friends coming in to congratulate him, I was quite curious, so I asked him how he came to organise this happy ending?

He told me that his father had to borrow some money from friends and relatives,

and then he sold his white cake shop. Xiaoma also got a loan for a car, completing the dowry requirements. After the wedding the newly-weds would move to southern China and start a business there to pay back the loans and debts. With much excitement, he continued to describe his dream: "I will save money to buy a house for my wife and children, then ask my elderly parents to live with us!"

Shortly after the wedding I heard the newly-weds moved south. And what about that important sports car? Sold.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray for Muslims in north China who live in relative poverty and often fall into debt to marry and have a family.
- Many Chinese Muslims believe men should be married at 19; girls who are not married by 16 can be looked at with disdain. Pray that these young people will find their value in God's eyes.
- Pray that marriages among the Hui will be blessed and that young people will not be pressurised to get married under the weight of custom and society's opinion.



a Chinese Muslim wedding banquet lasts for three days with all food and drinks provided

Families in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan was a republic of the former Soviet Union until it gained independence in 1991. It is the only parliamentary republic in the region. This mountainous country (the highest peak is 24,406 feet) is home to approximately 6 million people, and 75 per cent of the population are Sunni Muslims. The practice of Islam was quite shallow under Soviet rule but has steadily strengthened over the last 25 years.

Due to a difficult economic situation in the country, many people have been forced to earn money abroad, often under very difficult circumstances: 16 young Kyrgyz women were killed in a Moscow warehouse fire in August 2016, for example. Children left behind are often looked after by grandparents or other relatives; some are even sent to orphanages so their parents can go to work. Though their everyday needs are provided for, many children grow up with the feeling of being abandoned and unloved because of separation from their families.

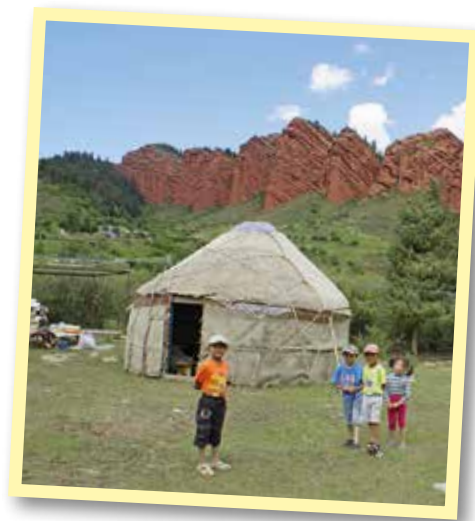
Mothers of sons play a very large role in Kyrgyz family structure, controlling everything. Daughters-in-law are often treated like slaves. If they don't become pregnant during the first two years of marriage, the husband is often forced by his

mother to dismiss his wife and marry another woman. In addition, bride kidnapping is still very common, particularly in rural areas. Young women might be kidnapped and forced to marry a stranger. Many Kyrgyz wives in desperate situations believe that suicide is their only way out.

The first Kyrgyz house groups and churches were planted in the 1990s and began teaching Christian principles for family life, of love and service to one another. However, it is very difficult for believers to profess their faith in Christ within traditionally close family structures — they often face hostility and are ostracised by their family or friends.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- For the economic situation to improve so that families don't have to choose between living together and providing financially.
- For mothers of sons to use their influence to encourage their sons to build loving marriages and do what is best for their daughters-in-law.
- For Christian families to challenge cultural expectations and demonstrate family relationships characterised by love and serving one another.



Many children grow up with the feeling of being abandoned and unloved because of separation from their families

A Syrian refugee family waits

At a military-run refugee camp in Greece, we meet a Kurdish family whose story reflects many others in the camp.

Father Aza worked as a taxi driver. Mother Gilya cared for 12-year-old Mohamed, eight-year-old Hadidja and little Ibrahim, who just turned three. The family home in Aleppo, Syria, was destroyed by a bomb during the war, causing them to decide to find a safer place to live somewhere in Europe — preferably Germany.

They marched across the Turkish border and found their way to Izmir and the Mediterranean Sea. There, Aza paid €5,000 (then about £4,000) to people smugglers for a place on a rubber boat. They reached the Greek shore safely only to be stranded in the border village of Idomeni, just a few days after the borders had closed. After waiting in the border camp for three months, they

were brought to the military camp to wait for registration and hopefully to be given refugee status.

In the camps, our family continues to live in a tent while waiting for better housing to become available. The food is basic and there is nothing to do, just wait. A non-governmental organisation at the camp started a school for the children. Mohamed had only gone to school for two years before the war broke out. Hadidja never went to school and Ibrahim was born during the war and has known nothing else in his young life. Mohamed has picked up some English from the volunteers and sometimes acts as a translator for the rest of the family.

The family used most of their savings to escape from Syria, and Aza is depressed because he cannot care for his family. Gilya tries to keep their family life going,

sometimes borrowing a cooking plate to make additional food and keeping the tent, the clothes and the children clean. Despite all their experiences, however, our refugee family still love to have people come and visit them and at least to offer tea or coffee to them as they wait for their life to begin again.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- For Christians to continue to advocate for and serve the needs of the refugees waiting in camps like this one.
- For helpers who speak the language of the refugees and can communicate with them on a deep level.
- For refugee children like these to have opportunities for education and a normal childhood.



Disability among tribal families of the Middle East

Traditional family life in the Arabian Peninsula is built around the tribe, and is still very like biblical times. The identity, multiplication and economic influence of each tribe is important and a source of great pride. It is an inbuilt social pattern that has been reinforced over countless generations and remained unchanged until around 50 years ago with the discovery of oil. Economically, everything changed rapidly, putting the Gulf nations on a par with the richest in the world. Socially, however, even with advances in health and education, the mindset within the family structure has changed very little.

As a means of protecting the purity of the tribal families, the tradition of marriage within close family relations, such as first cousins, is very common. Over the generations, this has resulted in a significant incidence of stillborn babies or those with birth defects and genetic disorders. Traditionally, these children have been hidden away at home, very often out of fear; they are separated from other members of the family, being considered a judgment from God.

The incidence of disability in this region is high, but is unfortunately not accurately recorded as there is such a shame factor

surrounding disability generally. Very rarely will you see a disabled person in public, even though almost every family will have someone who suffers from a birth defect. Many families suffer the grief as well as the shame of a disabled child but are reluctant to go anywhere for help.

In an effort to address this issue and support families, some Gulf nations have teams of trained and dedicated local women working in government projects with children aged three to 18 years, catering for a wide range of disability groups with the object of enabling as many as possible to enter mainstream education. Many more are supported and educated to have an enjoyable quality of life.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- That the new generation of young families would create a change in the social pattern to reduce the cases of disability and take advantage of help offered.
- For more opportunities for families with disabled children to get help and support.
- That the love of Jesus for these precious children would be evident to them and to their parents.



Bakar's story

Bakar had everything in place to succeed in life in his home in Malaysia: a loving, stable family with no financial worries. As the only son in the family he was showered with attention and was the apple of his father's eye. He felt under pressure to make his family proud.

Bakar stumbled under the pressure and was drawn into drug addiction. He ended up living on the streets, eating out of rubbish bins and looking for ways to get the next fix. Family was furthest from his mind at that moment, his relationship with them was strained to breaking point, and the rest of society did not look too kindly on him, either. Despair and loneliness were his constant companions.

One day, his needle-scarred legs unable to hold him up, Bakar collapsed behind a rubbish bin. He was found by a group of young Christians, who brought him to the hospital for treatment. He spent one night in the hospital before the doctor told the nurses to get rid of "this piece of trash".

His new friends collected him, brought him to their home and showered him with care and love, providing him with shelter and a place to recuperate. Their living example of the gospel spoke volumes to Bakar's heart, as they prayed unceasingly for him.

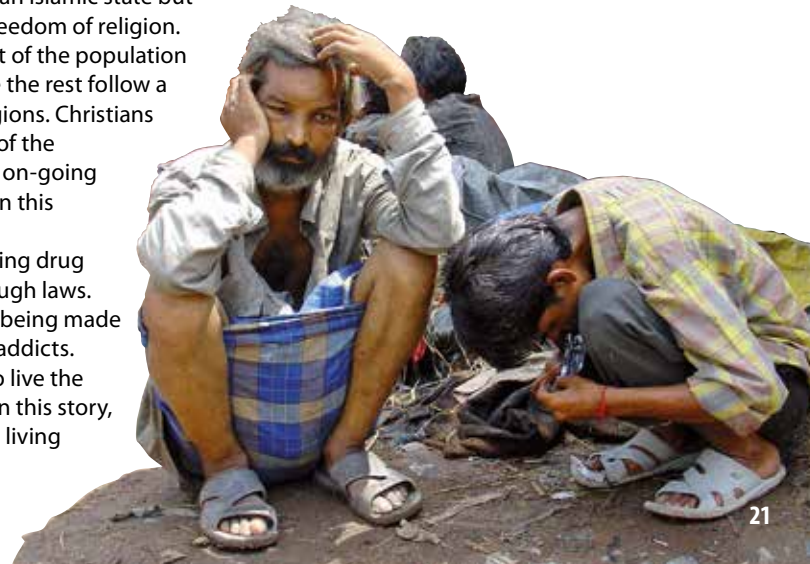
Touched by the sheer amount of love shown, Bakar could not contain it any longer. He asked them, "Why are you showing me such love? Whatever you have deep down inside, I want it too!"

Heaven rejoiced as Bakar decided to follow *Isa Al-Masih* (Jesus Christ). Today, he is happily married with a family, is a doting grandfather, and has reconciled with the rest of his family, particularly his father, with whom he has become the closest of friends.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Malaysia is officially an Islamic state but it also guarantees freedom of religion. Just over 60 per cent of the population practise Islam, while the rest follow a variety of other religions. Christians make up 9 per cent of the population. Pray for on-going peace and stability in this diverse nation.
- Malaysia has a growing drug problem, despite tough laws. Pray for new efforts being made to help rehabilitate addicts.
- Pray for Christians to live the gospel message as in this story, and in that way be a living testimony.

"Why are you showing me such love? Whatever you have deep down inside, I want it too!"



The Ishelhayn Berbers

Over 4.5 million Ishelhayn Berbers live in southern Morocco, both north and south of the high Atlas Mountains, their traditional home, although many are migrating to cities outside this region. Many Ishelhayn lived in the Moroccan plains before the Arabs invaded in the eighth century but moved from the plains to the mountains, where they eventually adopted Islam but also kept many of their own customs.

Traditional Ishelhayn homes are built of stone or earth with rooms surrounding a central courtyard and a special lounge kept looking pleasant for guests. They are often found working in small shops called

hanuts that are open all hours and sell a wide range of goods, or running warehouses to supply *hanuts*.

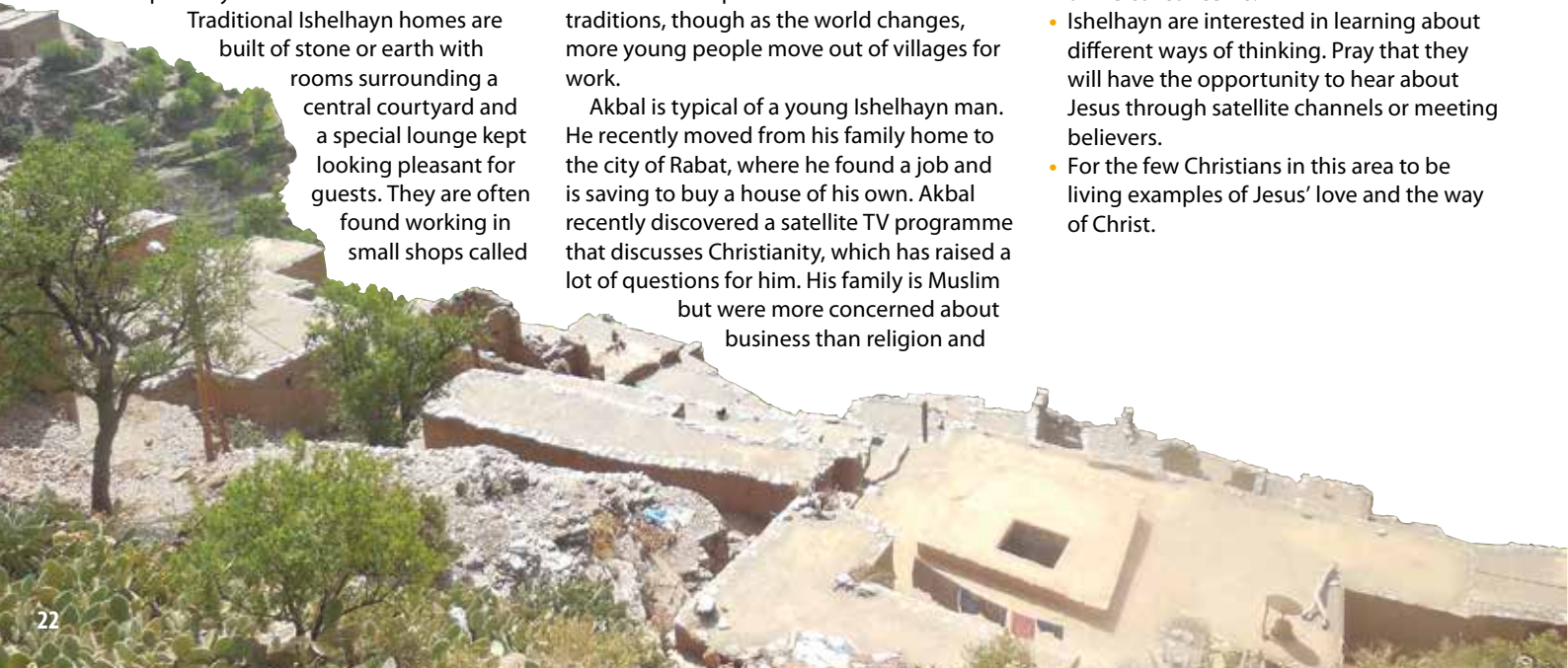
Financial security is important to the Ishelhayn. They will work hard to ensure the financial future of their families and to be a respectable person in society — this means getting married, having children, and being a good family person. Children are expected to honour their parents and follow their traditions, though as the world changes, more young people move out of villages for work.

Akbal is typical of a young Ishelhayn man. He recently moved from his family home to the city of Rabat, where he found a job and is saving to buy a house of his own. Akbal recently discovered a satellite TV programme that discusses Christianity, which has raised a lot of questions for him. His family is Muslim but were more concerned about business than religion and

did not practise much outside Ramadan or holidays. Akbal has been thinking about God and what it means to know Him, but he knows his family would be ashamed of him if he decided to follow a different faith.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray for Ishelhayn families — worries about financial security and family honour are universal concerns.
- Ishelhayn are interested in learning about different ways of thinking. Pray that they will have the opportunity to hear about Jesus through satellite channels or meeting believers.
- For the few Christians in this area to be living examples of Jesus' love and the way of Christ.



The Minangkabau of West Sumatra

“Ya Allah, please may this child be a girl!” Having had four boys, Dedi and Putri were praying fervently that their fifth child would finally be a girl.

Despite being a strongly Muslim people group, the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Indonesia, want daughters rather than the sons that are desired in many other Muslim cultures. This is because Islam in West Sumatra is intertwined with a strongly matrilineal society in which the inheritance passes to the oldest daughter. As sons grow up and move away to find their fortune, the daughters remain with their parents and,

when they marry, their husband moves into the family home. Frequently, the blood relatives are deemed as more important than the new husband, who is often viewed as a guest in the family home.

While in major cities family ties are weakening, every member of the entire clan still needs to agree for a plot of family land to be sold. These family ties could be a means for the gospel message to be widely shared, but they have also been one of the biggest obstacles to Muslims coming to faith. Fear of being different and of being ostracised stops many people from exploring their faith. When Minangkabau do follow Jesus they are typically swiftly rejected by their families. If the husband comes to faith, his wife may divorce him. If a single woman comes to faith she will lose her inheritance.

Of the more than 8 million Minangkabau people, there are less than a thousand believers. Many of them are Minangkabau women who married Christian men from other people groups and thereby became Christians.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Women enjoy a prominent role in Minangkabau society. Pray that influential women will be good role models.
- Pray for the heart of the Minangkabau culture as it is pulled in different directions; towards the traditions of the past, towards a more orthodox Arabic form of Islam and towards globalisation and the West.
- Pray for whole families, not just isolated ones and twos, to experience new life in Jesus.

When Minangkabau do follow Jesus they are typically swiftly rejected by their families



Muslim refugees in Sweden

In 2015, over 161,000 asylum seekers crossed the border into Sweden — at one point there were 10,000 refugees per week entering the country. With a population of only 9.5 million, that meant Sweden accepted more refugees in proportion to its population than any other nation in the developed world. This overstretched Sweden’s ability to process, house and integrate applicants: by the end of the year, the country decided to try to close its doors to new arrivals.

Many churches and ministries have been helping to fill the gap. In Borlänge, volunteers provided food and

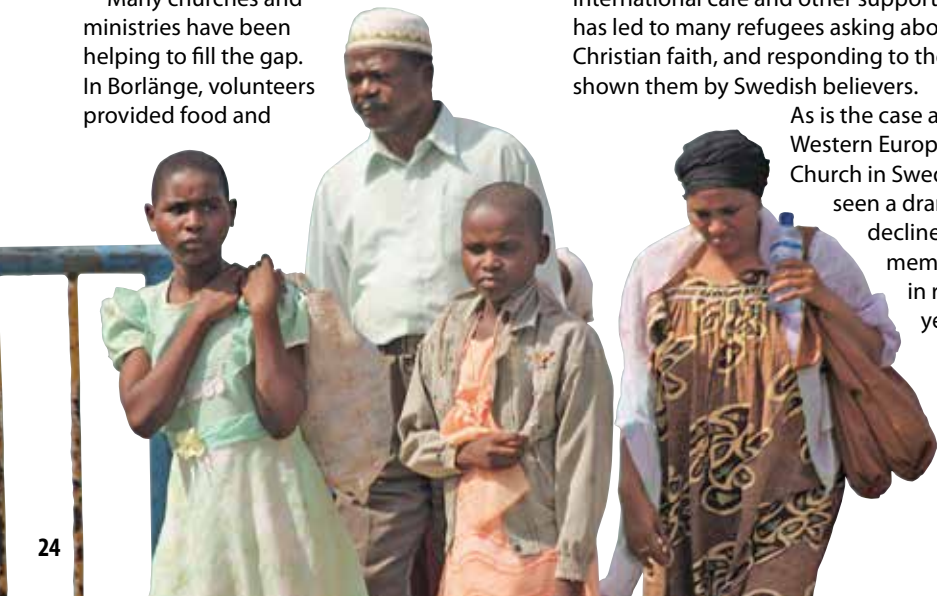
assistance at an emergency shelter where 50 people were accommodated in beds around the wall of a warehouse with two showers and portable toilets. Some families ended up in this shelter for up to three weeks before being moved to temporary housing, where many waited for between six and nine months for interviews with immigration officials that would confirm their status in Sweden and allow them to settle. During that time, the refugees had nothing to do, so volunteers began to organise an international café and other support. This has led to many refugees asking about the Christian faith, and responding to the love shown them by Swedish believers.

As is the case across Western Europe, the Church in Sweden has seen a dramatic decline in membership in recent years.

However, this influx of Muslim refugees has brought more new believers to the Church than has been seen in decades. One small, quiet town of 5,000 people had a thousand refugees (mostly Syrian and Afghan) move in and many of them began attending church. At a recent baptism for a whole Syrian family, one elderly Swedish member was very moved and commented that she had not seen a whole family baptised there since she was a small child at the end of the Swedish revival.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- As Sweden struggles to balance its resources with its desire to help, pray for just decisions on immigration and enthusiastic support from the Church for those who arrive.
- Many families are very lonely, waiting long months for visa interviews and the start of their new life. Pray for them to be encouraged and befriended.
- Sweden has a distinctive culture. Pray for refugees from very different backgrounds who are attempting to integrate.



Educating girls

We were on our way to a distant, remote village at the “rooftop of the world” for a celebration. The community we were travelling to is part of a large group of nomadic people that spread across India and Pakistan. This conservative Sunni group is illiterate and impoverished, but they desire more for their children.

Several years ago, our team met with religious leaders here to evaluate the needs of the village. Together, we started to educate boys by providing curriculum, uniforms, furniture, teachers’ salaries, and tents to use as classrooms in the high pastures in summer. Later, we were overjoyed when the village elders asked about educating their girls! This was the desire God had put on our hearts and now here we

were on our way to inaugurate the first girls’ school!

Village elders, a few government leaders, and many men and children were gathered to hear speeches and to honour guests. Our team brought books, uniforms and materials for 15 girls who would be going to school. To our surprise, we found out there were 70 girls to be enrolled — not just 15! Amazingly, as news had spread about the offer for girls to go to school, many more families were open to educating their daughters — something that had never been done in the history of their village!

This was truly a celebration! A local father said, “I always feel happy when I see books and pencils in the hands of my children. I used to cry at not being able to help my

children. I have six daughters and three sons. Today, they are all going to school!” Imagine what else God has in store for these families!

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray for cooperation between village leaders and local organisations such as the one featured here, who work to provide much-needed services for families in South Asia.
- Girls’ schools are often threatened and attacked in this region. Pray for peace and safety for all so that girls can also have opportunities for a better future.
- Pray for translation work to continue and for hearts to be eager to receive God’s Word when these families read scripture for the first time in their own language.



Domari Gypsies of the Middle East

The Domari Gypsies are scattered about the Middle East, in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Palestine. They are often called by the derogatory term “Nawar” in this region. Originating from northern India, the Domari migrated to the Middle East between

700 and 1,000 years ago. They were originally a nomadic people, known for their love of music and dancing. Although most are now settled in different places, many still live in tents, often made from wooden frames and old recycled materials.

Domari Gypsies are looked down on by the rest of society, and Gypsies will often try to hide their identity. They face discrimination in the larger community, and abuse within the family is common. Many of them do not have official papers so their children are unable to attend school or receive medical care. Families tend to be large and girls are married at a very young age. There is a lot of pressure on women to bring in money — girls are sometimes sent by their fathers to work as dancers or prostitutes, and the children can be seen begging while the men gather in groups, drinking coffee and discussing matters of their community.

Gypsies in the Middle East have adopted the local Muslim faith but they are also very superstitious, practising folk Islam and sorcery in an attempt to manage the spirit world. Where Domari Gypsies have become Christians in the

Middle East they show an inherent desire to worship God through music. They are bold and passionate people, full of faith and very resilient.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray for better opportunities to improve the Domaris’ economic situation, for help with education and job creation so that families can provide for their needs without exploitation.
- Pray for freedom from the fear of evil spirits and superstition and an understanding of the love and light of God.
- Pray for the Domari Gypsies who are believers — that they will find a way to use the strengths of their culture to bring positive change within their communities.

Domari Gypsies are looked down on by the rest of society and Gypsies will often try to hide their identity



When faith changes a family



*“If you want to know who I am,
ask who we are”*

What might be the implications for a Muslim family when one person becomes a follower of Christ, particularly within a culture that strongly identifies as Muslim?

A friend of mine called me today to ask if I could go to meet her and her friend, a new believer from a Muslim background. Her friend, Soraya, is worried about telling her family about her new faith.

Like many new believers from a Muslim background, Soraya is excited and amazed at God’s work in her life but that is balanced with her fear of telling her family. She is aware of the potential implications for her relationship with her family. It’s not only *how* she tells them that will have an effect on their relationship, but also *when* — the timing.

Like many new Muslim-background believers, Soraya is eager to be fully engaged with her new faith community and she wonders if she needs to be baptised. We talk and pray with her about baptism and the right time to be baptised. We pray for wisdom and guidance about when and what words to use to tell her family about the changes in her faith. She needs the support of her brothers and sisters in Christ. We’re there to help her think through the decisions she must make.

The implications for Soraya’s family are deep — within their culture, they will be shamed by her decision to follow Jesus. When the extended family and community find out, Soraya’s family could be ostracised and her parents may find it difficult to find a husband for her sister. They may feel the need to disown her or pretend she is still a Muslim and ask her to keep her faith a secret from the rest of the family.

There is an Arab proverb that says, “If you want to know who I am, ask who we are.” This reflects the way many Muslims would define their identity and how connected they are to their family, extended family and community as well as their Islamic heritage.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- The world is becoming locally more diverse. Pray for people like Soraya who are introducing new ideas about faith into a traditional family or culture.
- Pray for Christians who support new believers from Muslim backgrounds to have sensitivity and compassion and provide strong support to new brothers and sisters.
- Pray from Matthew 19:29 for those who are rejected by their family and community because of their faith in Jesus.

The Beja of Sudan

Amna, wearing a bright blue robe wrapped around her body and head and with a gold ring through her nose, sits and looks at the burning coals as she roasts the coffee beans, the repeated shaking a soothing rhythm to her emotions.

Amna is 21 years old and lives in Daim al Arab, the poor Beja area of Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast. There are about 3 million Beja people living along a swathe of land from southern Egypt to the western lowlands of Eritrea. Amna grew up as part of a nomadic group, wandering in the tough dry lands around the Red Sea Hills.

Amna was circumcised at the age of five, a painful traumatic experience that time has numbed but not healed. She is now married with a son, Mohammed, but her husband, Hassan, had to flee from Sudan — political unrest has led to the harassment and displacement of the Beja people. He faced further threats in Egypt and escaped in a dangerous journey to Europe, where he is housed in a bleak asylum centre. Amna speaks to him occasionally on the phone but he is depressed and has no money to send her.

Seeking spiritual comfort, Amna follows a mixture of folk Islam, with *jinn*s and evil spirits her constant companions. She longs

for the nomadic life of old and for meaning in her life but she cannot find the peace she longs for. She sips the strong, sweet coffee and looks out on the dusty street. A tear rolls down her dark brown cheek and she wipes it gently with her wrap. Who will help me and who will rescue me, she ponders. Her son plays in the dirt of her shack. A new day has begun.



HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Access to the Beja people is difficult and the system of folk Islam that they practise holds them in fear. Pray for believers in Egypt, Sudan and Eritrea to reach out to these people with the good news of Jesus and with practical help.
- Pray for the completion of a Bible for these people. The language was unwritten until 20 years ago but much of the Word of God has now been translated.
- Pray for more opportunities to serve and support the Beja, who can be found among refugee groups all over the world.

Uzbeks in Tajikistan

Seven-year-old Bilol smiles shyly as he goes door to door in his village with his friends, collecting candy and other treats on the Feast holiday (*Eid al-Fitr*) at the end of Ramadan. Though he started first year last week, his state-required school uniform isn't quite his size and is already stained. He has a scrape on his face from scuffling with another boy. What you wouldn't know about Bilol, at first glance, is that he can hardly remember ever seeing his parents together. His dad left to find work in Russia five years ago, and has not contacted his family since. Relatives occasionally hear from someone who has seen him, so they know he's still there working.

Like most Uzbeks, when Bilol's parents got married they lived with his father's parents, his brothers and their wives and children. But when his dad didn't return from Russia, his mum eventually took Bilol and his two siblings back to live with her parents. That became a hardship for them so, two years ago, Bilol's mother also left to find work in Russia. Eventually, she did find work, and she periodically sends money back home to her parents. Bilol spends time at both of his grandparents' homes, which are only a few hundred yards apart in their village. But much of the time he's growing up without



He can hardly remember ever seeing his parents together

the caring attention and stable environment that a child needs.

Bilol is only one of a generation of Uzbek children who are growing up with a "parental attention deficit". Tajikistan is the poorest country in the former Soviet Central Asian region, and many are struggling to support their families, particularly in the villages. As a result, at least half of the men work abroad for most of the year. Uzbeks (roughly 25 per cent of the population) are more likely than the majority Tajiks to work abroad, as being a minority they are much less likely to secure a dependable state job.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray that children like Bilol will hear the amazing news about God the Father's love for them!
- Pray that the parents who have gone abroad to find work encounter followers of Christ in those places who will help them.
- Pray for wise leadership in Tajikistan to form a more stable economy so that families can stay together.

The people of Saudi Arabia

Several years ago, an American teenager gave his Saudi friend a Bible. It sat around his house, not being used, until one day the Saudi teenager's father, Ahmed, found it and began to read it. Ahmed had been praying for God to reveal truth to him, and when he began to read the pages of the *Injil* (New Testament) he was cut to the heart and began to realise that this was the Word of God — the truth he had been searching for his whole life.

Ahmed read the Bible through twice. He has begun talking to his wife about these things, but his wife is threatening to leave him if he converts. It is no small thing to change your faith in Saudi Arabia. The penalty for choosing to follow Christ is severe — the government has the legal authority to imprison, beat or kill someone who converts away from Islam. Not only that, but families are so devastated and shamed by a relative converting that they will often exile, beat or even kill the one who has converted to restore the honour to their family name.

It takes great courage even to allow yourself to think differently about your faith in a nation like Saudi Arabia, known as the birthplace of Islam and with its fierce tribal loyalty and strict religious laws. But no one

has yet found a way to control the spirit of those who long to know the ways of God for themselves, and many are finding ways to follow Jesus within Saudi culture.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray for leaders and lawmakers in Saudi Arabia to permit an increase in religious freedom for their nation.
- Every woman in Saudi Arabia has a male guardian — often a father or husband, sometimes a brother or son — who has the power to make a range of critical decisions on their behalf. Pray for women who are protesting against this inequality and seeking more freedom.
- Despite their different culture and experiences, Saudi men are at heart just as all men are. Pray for them as you would pray for the men in your own family.



It is no small thing to change your faith in Saudi Arabia

Night of destiny

Laylat al-Qadr is the night when Muslims believe the first verses of the Qu'ran were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. It occurs on one of the odd-numbered nights during the last ten days of Ramadan, most commonly the 27th night. (This guide begins on the first full day of fasting, so it is the 26th day but the 27th night of Ramadan.) It is said that God did not reveal the exact date, so that His

Laylat al-Qadr

Laylat al-Qadr is translated variously as the Night of Decree, Night of Power, Night of Value, Night of Destiny, or Night of Measures.

servants would perform extra acts of worship throughout the ten days and so gain reward from them.

There are different beliefs and traditions surrounding *Laylat al-Qadr*. Some Muslims believe that on this night the fate of creation for the coming year is determined, and that prayers are more powerful, sins are forgiven and the blessings and mercy of God are more abundant. It is a night to expect a special closeness to God, and there are many reports of Muslims having dreams or visions of Jesus on this night.

Muslims observing Ramadan will increase their prayers and reading of the Qu'ran during the last ten days. Some who are able will move into the mosque for a time of

retreat to worship, pray and read the Qu'ran there for this time. In this way, they hope to earn extra divine favour.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray for Muslim families around the world to have a special awareness of the presence of God as they pray through *Laylat al-Qadr*.
- Pray for the needs of Muslim people, particularly in areas of the world where there is conflict or great need.
- Pray that on this night the Holy Spirit would give dreams and visions to those who are seeking revelation.

It is a night to expect a special closeness to God

Protecting Muslim youth in Europe

A bomb goes off in Paris and ISIS (Islamic State) claims responsibility. For conservatively-dressed Muslims across Europe, once again it will mean stares, taunts, abuse on social media, and occasionally worse. And knowing it will happen again.

Yasmin, the 15-year-old Muslim daughter of a friend, wrote a poem (right), expressing what that feels like. It makes me weep: the pressure of a thousand stares in the public space, and a media that seems committed to demonising them, has scarred young people like her and reaps sad consequences.

Many young people are resilient enough, and with strong family support the impact rolls away. Some become angry, expressing it just as many teenagers of all cultures might. A few — and it is only a few — won't be so lucky. They become vulnerable to the message of extremism and are increasingly drawn down that path. As they become detached from their family there will be despairing parents, struggling to make sense of it all. As if that isn't bad enough, the finger of suspicion may rest on them as well as their prodigals. They may be unwelcome in the mosque, questioned at school, and repeatedly questioned by police.

Yasmin is lucky. Her parents understand. They support their daughter, helping her to

understand and encouraging her to let it go. But that is also her mother's job — Farzana works with victims of hate crime, people wrongly identified as extremists, young people angry at the discrimination, and helps them process their experience. Rather than allowing them to become alienated and isolated, and potential candidates to be groomed into extremism, she works to draw them back into the mainstream.

I asked Farzana how Christians could pray for victims of hate crime, for the alienated, and for families impacted by members on the journey to being lost to extremism. Her answer was immediate, "What would Jesus do? Don't blindly condemn. Reach out in love and acceptance. I read the other day that Jesus came for us in our darkest hour. Ask how would he come for these?"

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray for teenagers like Yasmin, who must navigate difficult years in the spotlight of suspicion.
- Pray for the work of people like Farzana, who help prevent young people being lost to extremist groups.
- Pray for families who have lost their sons and daughters to terrorism and for those who live with the threat of hate crime.

Yasmin's poem

*Walking through a crowded place,
Judgmental stares
Apparent on every face,
For actions taken in my name,
You think that I am in disgrace,
You refuse my hand
You ignore my embrace
What did I do to deserve this hate?*

*I wear a headscarf,
My dad has a beard,
You mock me and say I'm weird,
I fast,
I pray,
I volunteer,
Yet still I am unwelcome here,
Practising my faith in constant fear.*

*Terrorists deface Islam as they
ravage and ruin the common man,
This is not my faith and not Islam,
Don't assume it is, we're about salaam,
Don't hold me accountable for the insane,
As all around, you'll see the same.*

The Gonja of North Ghana

The Gonja (population: 310,000) live in the Northern Region of Ghana. It is said that Islam has been around since the early establishment of the Gonja kingdom in AD 1600 but only became relevant in the last decades. Today, “to be a Gonja means to be a Muslim”. However, the majority of Gonja still practise some form of worship of local gods and the veneration of ancestors.

Most families live in a compound that consists of three to ten rooms. A compound is occupied by a man, his wives and any unmarried children. When a son gets married, he must build his own compound and move out of his father’s. But they will continue to consult each other on any important family issues. Family influence, therefore, becomes an important factor in decisions about faith.

Those who decide to follow Christ face persecution of various forms and levels. For example:

Family influence, therefore, becomes an important factor in decisions about faith

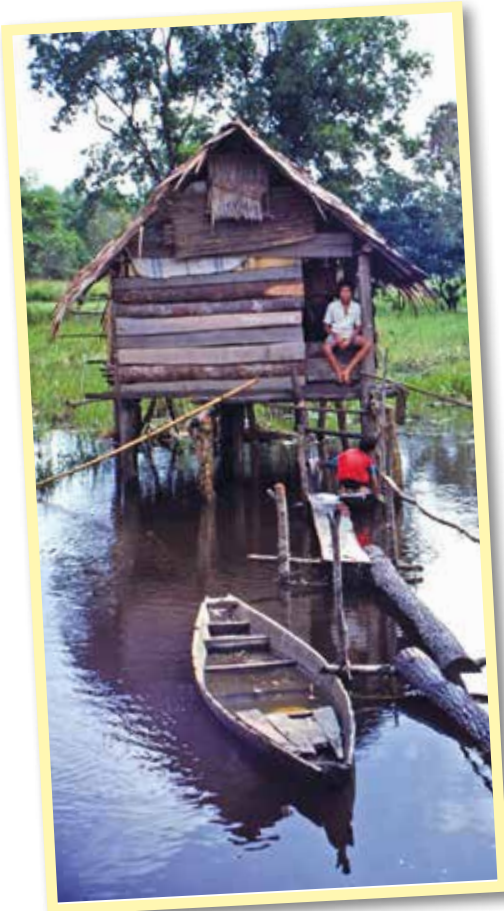
- Hanifa and Musa are cousins and have been best friends since childhood. They used to spend all their time together. When Hanifa became a Christian, Musa’s father and brothers urged Musa not to eat with Hanifa again as he is now considered unclean.
- Seid was attacked at gunpoint in his room by his own father because he had become a Christian. He saved himself by escaping through the window.
- Ashata is currently under pressure from her family to divorce her husband, with whom she has four children, because he became a follower of Jesus after they got married.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- For Gonjas believers to understand how to share their faith within their families without causing separation.
- The Gonja have one of the lowest literacy rates in Ghana. Pray for programmes that are working to improve opportunities for holistic development in Gonja communities through literacy.
- For Gonja families to influence one another to be open to hear the message of Jesus.



The Komering of Indonesia



The Komering live in South Sumatra, a province in the south of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. They live in an area that is swampy, which makes it good for growing the rice that forms the main part of their diet. They tend to dwell along the banks of the Komering River in simple houses, some built on stilts.

Most of the Komering are farmers and fishermen. They also produce beautiful handicrafts of red and gold fabrics and carved wood furniture. They are a close-knit group, focused on providing for their families, caring for their elders and preserving their community. Poverty is the standard of living for the Komering, who desire to create better lives for their families but face insurmountable challenges such as drought, polluted water and deforestation, all of which impact their ability to provide.

The Komering were introduced to Islam through traders from Malaysia. While many Komering do not go to the mosque, being Muslim is still an important part of their cultural identity and many practise a form of folk Islam. They are a very straightforward and outspoken people, making them different culturally from many other people groups in Indonesia, who tend to be shy and reluctant to speak their mind. Christians

working among them have found that the Komering are hospitable and welcoming to others who demonstrate sincerity and dependability, and they are open to learning more about the way of Jesus.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Few Komering children manage to attend school and develop the opportunity to make their way out of poverty. Pray for educational options that will enable the Komering to adapt to their changing environment and be able to continue supporting their families.
- Pray for groups to partner with the Komering to provide employment and help them improve their agricultural production.
- Pray for Christians working among the Komering to have their same approach of acceptance and directness when it comes to sharing about their faith.

They are open to learning more about the way of Jesus

France: praying for those who persecute you

In recent years, France has been the victim of several bloody terrorist attacks inspired by Islamic extremism. Some of these attacks have been clearly focused, such as the killing of the staff at the magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, or the clients of a Kosher supermarket and at a rock concert — and of course the shocking assassination of an elderly Catholic priest during mass. Others have been indiscriminate, costing the lives of Muslims as well as Christians. Pavement cafés have been sprayed with bullets and innocent people run over by a truck.

It would be a lie to say that this has not created a deep sense of shock and revulsion. At first, there was a national outpouring of solidarity and unity, even a sense of sympathy towards non-extremist Muslims living in France. However, as attacks have continued, there are signs that the remarkable tolerance of the French people is wearing thin. That is, of course, just what the terrorists were hoping to achieve.

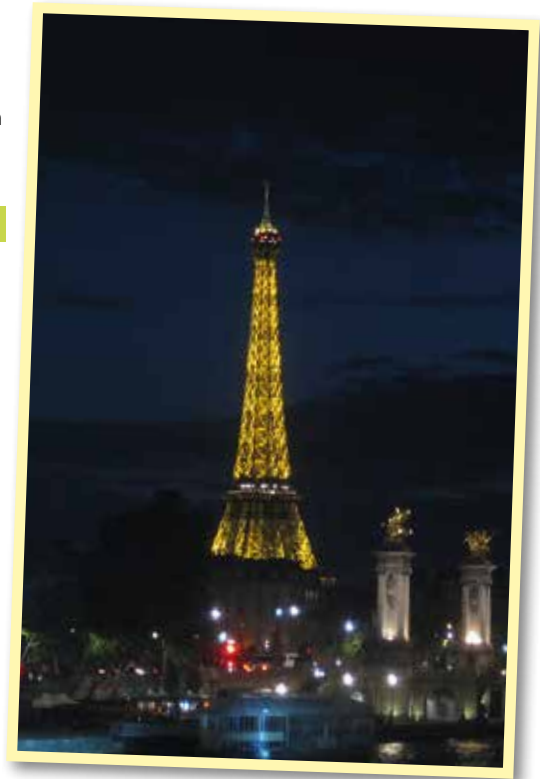
Christian leaders in France remind us: “For Christians, living alongside Muslim neighbours and fellow-citizens, we must go back to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:44: ‘Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you will become children of your Father in heaven.’

The challenge is to meet hate with love. To look at every veiled woman or North African man that we cross in the street, with love in our hearts and not rejection. If we are confused, we must understand that non-violent Muslims are even more confused. Love means trying to understand them, and praying that God would touch their hearts. In France, we live with over 4.5 million Muslims. God has placed them on our door-step.”

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Jesus said, “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?” Pray for Christians in France, and in all nations affected by extremism, that they will be able to follow the teaching of Christ to love our enemies.
- Pray for Muslims who are involved in, or thinking about becoming involved in, terrorist activity. Jesus says love and prayer go together — that is the purpose of this guide.
- Pray for the victims of violence and for the wisdom of government leaders. The purpose of terrorism is hate and division. More than ever, we need leaders who will lead with wisdom.

The challenge is to meet hate with love



What can I do next?

Ramadan is over but don't forget to send greetings and blessings for *Eid al-Fitr* to your Muslim friends! You can keep praying through the year!

Follow *30 Days International* on Facebook to receive more prayer ideas and updates— www.facebook.com/30daysprayer

And finally, consider supporting the production of *30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World* to help our team of volunteers keep it going each year.

To donate, visit
<http://pray30days.org/about/donate/>

THANK YOU FOR PRAYING!



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