

Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts.  
Zechariah 8:21

## STANDING IN THE GAP

for the Persecuted Church

August 2017

Continue praying for the **Chibok Girls** of Nigeria. Four of them are to start university in US in August. A Nigerian couple who has helped ten of the Chibok escapees to pursue their studies, travelled from Nigeria to Washington last month to attend the high-school graduation ceremony of two of them. **Debrah** and **Grace** were among 276 schoolgirls snatched overnight by the radical Islamist group Boko Haram from their school dormitory. Most of them are Christian, from the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria. The couple, **Paul and Rebecca Gadzama**, are co-founders and directors of the Education Must Continue Initiative (EMCI), a charity aimed at helping children pursue their studies in areas affected by Boko Haram's insurgency. "We took steps of faith when we brought some escaped girls into our house for almost 6 months and we eventually managed to take 10 of them to the US," says Rebecca. Unlike some of their schoolmates who escaped the terrorists' trucks in the moments after their abduction, Grace and Debrah were taken all the way to Boko Haram's camp in Sambisa Forest, before they escaped and made it back home in a terrifying journey that took about a week, with their captors in hot pursuit. Two others, **Joy and Lydia**, also completed US high school in June. Rebecca continues, "Many children who lost their parents to Boko Haram's insurgency are still in need of education. Thousands are displaced and live in camps. My husband and I attended schools set up by missionaries. Having benefited from that good education, we look back and said, 'We should do something...that's why we established EMCI.'" So far more than 2000 children attend EMCI schools in Nigeria. "The charity is still opening new schools so that education must continue," says Paul. "We also beg ad pray so that the remaining 113 girls still held will be released. We plead with the militants. We plead with the government, to do all they can."

Pray from Colossians 1 –

For this reason, since the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously giving thanks to the Father.

Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus

### SOURCES:

CHURCH IN CHAINS; CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE; CHRISTIAN TODAY; OPEN DOORS; PRISONER ALERT; RELEASE INTERNATIONAL; VOICE of the MARTYRS; WORLD MAGAZINE; WORLD WATCH MONITOR

1. **NIGERIA** - now that the militants of Boko Haram are slowly being pushed back by Nigeria's army, the full extent of the humanitarian need is becoming visible. The north eastern states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe are the most affected with over 5 million facing 'acute food insecurity' and needing food aid. More than half are children. Christians are often denied access to essential aid by government systems geared to cater to Muslim majorities.
2. **EGYPT** – continue to pray for **Coptic Christians** in Egypt as they are reeling from a fresh spate of murders, which they fear are part of a jihadist campaign against them. Three Coptic men were found dead in the space of 8 days from the last week of June to the first week of July. The lack of obvious motives and the methods used have led Copts to fear the killings may have been carried out by extremists loyal to groups such as IS. Found dead were Albert Fekry, 67, a Christian urologist; Girgis Bushra, 55, a Coptic jeweller; and Michael Nabil Bebawy, a 32 year old artist.
3. **IRAN** – pray for 4 Iranian Christians given lengthy prison terms. **Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz**, who led the Tehran Pentecostal Assyrian Church, and 3 converts, **Fallah-Mohammadi**, **Afshar-Naderi**, and **Hadi Asgari** were all given 10-15 years jail sentences for 'acting against national security by organizing and conducting house churches.'
4. **NIGER** – pray for **Els Woodke**, wife of pioneering American missionary **Jeff Woodke**, who was abducted 9 months ago. She has put out a video pleading for his safe return and expressing her despair and desire to be in touch with her husband's kidnappers.
5. **BURKINA FASO** – jihadist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda active in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso have recently released a video showing 6 foreign hostages, including 3 missionaries: Colombian nun **Gloria Argoti**, kidnapped in February; 82 year old surgeon **Ken Elliott**, kidnapped in Jan 2016; and Swiss missionary **Beatrice Stockly** also kidnapped in Jan 2016. Els Woodke believes her husband, Jeff, is being held with them as well.
6. **NIGERIA** – pray for **Ibrahim Maisaje**, a pastor of an ECWA(Evangelical Church Winning All) church in Panwasa Mada village. He went to his farm with his family on June 26. A Fulani herdsman was allowing his cattle to eat the pastor's crops. When Pastor Ibrahim confronted him, the herdsman cut him with his machete. They were able to settle the matter before the civil magistrate, and Pastor Ibrahim responded, "It took the grace of God upon me to forgive the Fulani man for what he had done to me and my crops."
7. **KAZAKHSTAN** – pray for the **Baptist Congregation** in the southern city of Taraz that has been raided by Kazakh police. The police took 7 worshippers to the local police station and accused them of 'participation in unregistered or banned religious community organization', and fined them.
8. **CHINA** – continue praying for **Pastor Zhang Shaojie**, 52, who is serving a 12-year prison sentence after being arrested in Nov 2013. His daughter reports that he is being tortured in prison for applying to file an appeal. The torture has included starvation and sleep deprivation.
9. **SUDAN** – pray for **Kuti**, a Sudanese pastor who works with Voice of the Martyrs to distribute Bibles and other aid to Christians in the Nuba Mountains, where Christians sleep in caves as protection from bombings by their own government – a government built on radical Islamic ideology and led by a man indicted for war crimes.

10. **IRAN** – pray for effectiveness of a petition signed in Paris in July by European and US faith leaders urging Western governments to make the plight of religious minorities central to any deal with Iran. In their petition, the signatories from the UK and US join former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, to “stress the harassment and persecution of Christians in Iran under the ruling theocracy.”
11. **NEPAL** – pray for Christian worker **Santosh Khadka**, who was shot 3 months ago in Kathmandu while returning home from a church service. Police have still not been able to identify the attackers, but local Christians say Khadka was targeted because of his religious-freedom work, as some groups in this young democracy are calling for the reinstatement of Hinduism as the state religion. He has recovered and continues his work, but admits to being fearful at times.
12. **YEMEN** – continue praying for Catholic missionary **Father Uzhunnalil**, 58, from India, who was kidnapped in March 2016 from the Missionaries of Charity Home for the Elderly where he worked in Yemen. Deputy Prime Minister of Yemen broke the news to the Indian Foreign Minister in July when they met for bilateral talks in India. Family members are hopeful he will be released soon.
13. **EGYPT** – continue praying for the **Christian Coptic Community** in Egypt. Attacks on Christians have intensified in brutality because of an influx of arms and foreign jihadists, lax border security and increased hostility to non-Muslims, according to a leading UK academic, Dr Mariz Tadros of Sussex University’s Institute of Development Studies.
14. **EGYPT** – the churches of Egypt are temporarily shutting down their summer activities. “I asked all our churches and conference centers to cancel their trips and events for the next 3 weeks,” said Dr Andrea Zaki, president of the Protestant churches of Egypt. “There is news that they could be targeted by radicals.” Father Boules Halim, official spokesman for the Coptic Orthodox Church, said his denomination issued similar instructions.
15. **IRAN** - pray for **Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani**, who has recently been sentenced to 10 years in prison. 12 Christians in all have been given heavy sentences. (see August 3 entry for others). Mansoor Borji, Advocacy Director of Article 18, an organization that defends persecuted Christians in Iran, stated, “The charges and sentences are out of fear; the sentences are harsh and the whole way the court hearings have been conducted...tells us about how the Iranian government is fearful of the growth of Christianity inside Iran.”
16. **SUDAN** – pray for **Pastor Matta**, who ministers in Sudan’s Nuba Mountains. He says, “Because of persecution, because of hatred, because of a lot of things against us, it made more Muslims open to hear and listen to the Gospel.”
17. **MEXICO** - “Let us pray for **peace and justice** in our communities.” This is from a statement from the diocese of recently murdered Mexican priest, Luis Lopez Villa, 71. He was killed by intruders at his San Isidro Labrador Parish on July 5. This is the third Mexican priest killed this year. Violence related to organized crime is “perhaps the most significant threat to Latin American Christians,” according to Dennis Petri of Open Doors. Christians are targeted because of the perception that churches and their leaders have a lot of money. The Mexican government’s indifference is thought to encourage the activities of criminal groups.
18. **UZBEKISTAN** – pray for **Azamat**, now in his 40’s with a wife and 2 children, who is a Muslim convert to Christianity. He was severely beaten because of his faith and still has health issues. He has constant headaches and needs surgery on his nose because he can’t breathe properly. He continues his underground work in house churches despite his poor health. “The last time I was questioned by the police, I thought I should give up. I wanted to sign a paper that I wouldn’t serve as a pastor anymore. But I didn’t give up.”
19. **INDIA** – pray for members of the **Temple of God Church** in Punjab. Their senior pastor, Sultan Masih, 47, was shot dead July 15. He had been pastor for 20 years and also ran a school for the poor from inside the church. He is survived by his wife and 2 sons.
20. **GHANA** – pray for the **Ghanaian Church** which is experiencing a growing missions movement to reach their own people; there are 18 people groups that have yet to hear of Jesus. Churches are being planted and growing numbers are coming to Christ through the Jesus Film, oral Bible strategies, and audio Bibles. Still, Islam continues to spread. Pray for the church’s protection.
21. **TURKEY** – pray for the estimated 2,500 **Syriac Christians** who live in southeast Turkey. The government has seized ownership of at least 100 centuries-old Syriac Christian properties in SE Turkey with no explanation.
22. **PAKISTAN** – pray for **Shahzad Masih**, 16, a Pakistani Christian boy charged with blasphemy for talking with a colleague about his belief in Jesus. He is a cleaner at a hospital in the city of Dinga and was arrested July 13 after being accused of insulting Islam’s prophet Muhammed, a crime punishable with death in Pakistan. Masih’s father says he and his family have been on the run ever since. “We don’t even know what to eat or where to live,” he said.
23. **ERITREA** – continue praying for 90 year old Eritrean Orthodox **Patriarch Abune Antonios**. He recently was allowed to participate in a mass at St Mary’s Cathedral in the capital, Asmara. Welfare rights agencies welcomed the proof that the 90 year old diabetic Patriarch is still alive, but were dismayed that his appearance signalled neither his release nor his reinstatement as the Eritrean Orthodox Church’s legitimate leader.
24. **IRAN** – continue praying for imprisoned Iranian Christian, **Ebrahim Firouzi**, 30, who has 5 years left of his sentence for ‘acting against national security.’ He recently announced a hunger strike: “Following the mistreatment of new Christian believers and converts by the judicial authorities, refusing Christian prisoners access to Christian literature, and issuing unjust and hefty verdicts and sentences against new Christian believers and converts to the point that in recent months tens of Christians have been sentenced to long years imprisonment, I hereby announce going on a hunger strike for a period of 10 days in support of the rights of fellow Christians.”
25. **ALGERIA** – praise God that imprisoned Algerian Christian **Slimone Bouhafs**, 49, has been granted a partial pardon by President Bouteflika, reducing his 3-year sentence to 16 months.
26. **NICARAGUA** – pray for **evangelicals** in Nicaragua; they have grown 40-fold in 50 years. And believers are growing in considerable influence, even in government. Nicaragua has been ravaged by war, disaster, poverty and broken families. This deep-seated poverty has also opened the doors for false teachings such as liberation and prosperity theology. There is also ongoing conflict and violence associated with drug trafficking. It is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.
27. **cont** – pray for the church to both proclaim the Gospel and seek justice for the oppressed.
28. **cont** – pray for a righteous government that seeks the good of its impoverished people.
29. **cont** – pray for Gospel-centered unity among the various Christian denominations.
30. **PHILIPPINES** – pray for the government and President Duterte as they consider a new law that will govern the creation of a new autonomous Muslim region in the southern Philippines.
31. **INDIA** – pray for **Alisha Masih**, 22, whose pastor father was shot dead in July(see August 19 entry). Alisha is also training to be a pastor like his father. “Our father was a courageous man and he was never afraid to die for Jesus,” Alisha said. “He has put the same zeal in us. Our family will continue to serve God.”