

Music: [00:00](#)

James: [00:01](#) When the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church was first conceived, it was conceived on the basis of asking persecuted Christians what we should do for them and the first thing that these said was to pray.

Paul Robinson: [00:15](#) Across the world today millions of Christians are persecuted. They face discrimination, imprisonment, displacement and even death simply because of their faith in Jesus Christ. These courageous believers are our brothers and sisters. We are in this together with them and we need to hear their voice. Join host Sarah as we discover their stories today on Release International's Voice Podcast.

Music: [00:15](#)

Sarah: [00:46](#) This year's International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, otherwise known as IDOP, takes place on Sunday 17th November. Throughout the month of November Release International, together with other organisations and churches, is calling on Christians here in the UK and Ireland to specially pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters. On today's podcast, I'm joined by released workers, Kenneth, Jack and James to discuss all things related to IDOP.

Sarah: [01:16](#) Today we're talking about IDOP. Jack, what is IDOP?

Jack: [01:20](#) Well IDOP's the International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians and so it's been going now for just over 20 years, so 1996 was the first one and it was conceived through the World Evangelical Alliance, so it's an interdenominational day of prayer for persecuted Christians around the world. And, and the first instance of it was when there was some serious issues in Iran in 1994 so there was a call to pray. A day of prayer for Iran, and out of that a team was commissioned to look at how we pray for persecuted Christians on an annual basis. And so they introduced in 1996 the International Day of Prayer.

James: [01:57](#) And it's not owned by any one particular agency or any one denomination. Really the vision of the thing is that it's about calling the whole church all across the world together to pray. And a fundamental part of that as well is that we are joining together with persecuted Christians in that prayer. It's not just about us praying for them. But as the worldwide church has called together, we actually pray with them. And I think there's power in that too.

- Sarah: [02:23](#) Presumably we'd all agree that we should be praying for persecuted Christians more than just one day. James, why are we singling out just one day in the year?
- James: [02:34](#) I suppose it's about focus isn't it? And I think we do the same with so many other things. We identify a particular day in the year in order to make sure we do actually remember it at least at one point. I suppose you could take example of Easter. We know that the resurrection and the death of Jesus is important for us all throughout the year. But we still celebrate it in one particular weekend. You could say the same for Christmas as well. The incarnations relevant all the time, but we celebrated it particularly at Christmas.
- Kenneth: [03:03](#) And I think the fact that we have one period in the year when we are intentional in terms of promoting and encouraging Christians and churches to think about and respond to persecution is important. And I think for many, many Christians, for many Christian congregations, it may well be that participating in, recognising an IDOP Sunday may for them be the start of something bigger, start of a journey, start of an ongoing sense of identifying with Christian brothers and sisters who are persecuted.
- Jack: [03:37](#) But I mean going back to James's point though, I think we need to emphasise the fact that it is probably one of the times in the year when the body of Christ worldwide will come together and be praying together over an issue such as this. And so there is, as James said, a power in that, a fellowship in that. There's the fact that we're joining together with that Body. And it's not just in the UK, it's, it's across the world that we calling Christians to set aside time during November for this.
- James: [04:06](#) I think it says in Matthew 18 that where one or two people agree on something on earth it will be done in heaven. Your Father sees it and it's done. I think of the power of the whole church across the globe coming together, raising a single voice, a wave of prayer to heaven. I think there's a great power in that when we agree Father God, please come and help our persecuted brothers and sisters.
- Sarah: [04:29](#) If you're used to being in church settings or hearing from Christian organisations you often hear the question asked, 'how can we help?' And the answer invariably is, 'the first and most important thing you can do is pray.' And that has the danger of sounding a bit like a meaningless cliché. Kenneth, how do we guard against that for IDOP and why is prayer the most important thing we can do?

Kenneth: [04:54](#) I think my answer to that would be: be specific. Be specific about what you're praying for, that's what prevents prayer becoming bland, cliched, meaningless. I sometimes say when I'm speaking in churches, you know: 'Dear Lord, please help the persecuted. Amen.' Well, that is a prayer. It's not much of a prayer and I would humbly venture to suggest that you wouldn't pray that for very long before giving up. The point is we pray about things that we know about. I never tire of praying for myself. I know all about my own sins and weaknesses and frailties and fears. Similarly for praying for my family, perhaps for my local church and so on. Now, whilst we're never going to know a persecuted Christian who lives on the other side of the world to the same degree that we know ourselves or our children or our parents, nevertheless we can know something about them. And I think prayer that is informed, prayer that is specific is prayer that won't become just a cliché.

Jack: [06:04](#) I think I would add to that, that for us, we need to remember the God that we're praying to. And there are countless examples in Scripture of where God's people cried out to him. He heard them and he intervened and he stepped in and that's what God encouraged us to do. Jesus told us as we pray - and we need to pray, it's a command that we need to do it. But we know from Scripture and we know from stories, from Christians across the world that as we pray, as the Body of Christ prays, that they are strengthened and that God sometimes will choose to miraculously intervene as Christians across the world cry out to him. And so I think our brothers and sisters, more so than us probably, who are in countries where they suffer as a result of their faith, they're aware of the way God can act powerfully when his people come to him in prayer. And so that's why they know that actually the first thing they want us to do is to pray.

James: [07:04](#) Yeah that's a really important point. I think you just touched on there, that actually when the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church was first conceived, it was conceived on the basis of asking persecuted Christians what we should do for them. And the first thing that they said was to pray. And that is because they understood exactly what you've said, Jack - how important prayer is because God chooses that as one of the ways in which he works in the world. That's something that I often say in speaking in churches is that our prayers is like the vehicle that God uses to unleash his compassionate action in the world. We need to see that. I think one of the reasons we don't see it as because culturally in the West we are so pragmatic about things and we hear that phrase that 'the first and most important thing you can do is to pray' and then we

run off and try and figure out what we can do to solve the problems because we're kind of programmed that way, we think that we have to act, we have to do something. But actually taking a step back and thinking, yeah, you know, God works effectively through our prayers and I think one of the reasons he does that is because we can then never claim credit for it. If you think about it, three wee Christians in a little village in rural England, praying for a Christian prisoner in Pakistan. How can we possibly affect change in their own power. But when that prisoner's free either when they receive the help they need, the glory goes to God, but he does it through the prayers of his people.

Music: [08:40](#)

[inaudible]

Sarah: [08:40](#)

Today on ReleaseInternational's Voice Podcast, we're talking about the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. We've just been reminded about IDOP's origins and why it's important for us to have a focused time in the year to remember our persecuted family, but it's not always easy to pray.

Sarah: [08:59](#)

I know many people though, myself included actually, sometimes find it quite difficult a subject to pray for. Perhaps the issues seem too remote or too huge or even too painful. Jack, what has helped you personally to pray for persecuted Christians?

Jack: [09:19](#)

I think we've touched on it already in that with anything, when we pray, I think we need to pray from an informed perspective. And so what helps me as I pray for persecuted brothers and sisters across the world is to make sure I know their stories. Now that may be through written form, it may be through hearing their testimonies through a radio or podcast or however, but just to get to know their stories so that almost they become part of my family. So myself and my wife each day we'll pray around our family and pray around the needs of our family before we set off into work. And so it almost then as we get to know the stories of brothers and sisters who suffer persecution round the world, they come into our family, they become our family and where we're privileged enough, whether they, when they're in the UK or maybe traveling abroad to get to know them personally, that deepens it. But the key thing is to get to know them in some way. So that could be, as I say, through many meetings, we certainly share the stories of some of the people we work with and try and help and, and who will prevail in their faith.

- Kenneth: [10:28](#) I think one of the great things about the prayer diary - it covers three months each time with the magazine, but it's organised so that you spend several days at a time in one country. So you may open up the new edition and you find that for the first seven days you're praying for Christians in India and then for the next week you're praying for Christians in Egypt and so on and so forth. And what I think that does for people who use it regularly is almost subliminally over a period of time you are taking in and taking on board what persecution looks like in those different countries. Because each day you're praying for a person in a situation and after you've prayed for Christians in one country for several days, you're just beginning to understand something of what persecution looks like in that particular country. And then obviously you move on to another country because as we always say, persecution looks different in different places. There are many faces to persecution. It looks different in different places and therefore it raises different needs in different places. And so I personally find our prayer diary very helpful and it just builds up that general awareness over a period of time of what persecution looks like around the world.
- James: [11:44](#) Hmm. And just to take a step back from that as well. You know, Hebrews 13:3 is a really important verse for us as a ministry. 'Remember those who are in prison as if you were in prison with them and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.' So there's that aspect of personal identification. Put yourself in their shoes. And I think when you start to ask those questions of yourself, you know, how would I react if I was beaten up for going to church? How would they feel if my kids were discriminated against in school? How would I want Christians on the other side of the world to pray for me if I was in that situation? And that intentional, you know, mental activity of putting yourself in their shoes helps us as well to then know how we would want to respond to that.
- Sarah: [12:36](#) You guys have worked for Release for several years now. What are some of the ways that you've seen IDOP Sunday done?
- Kenneth: [12:44](#) Obviously your church can have a speaker from Release if you plan well ahead. But even if that's not possible, you know, as Jack says, it's about being resourced and Release can obviously provide all sorts of resources. We've already talked about the magazine and prayer diary and our other resources that we can provide you and your church with just so that these issues are laid before your church. So that it's something that becomes a little bit of a focus that day.

- James: [13:14](#) So I think it's always good to sort of sketch out in general terms, the global picture that Christians in a variety of different places are suffering because of their faith for a variety of different reasons. But then as has already been said, zoom in a little bit to specific stories, to the very human face of it. Maybe use some videos you can download from our website to have that first person voice that confronts people, that challenges people to pray and to understand the situations and that'll help people to better grasp what it's about. Look at a passage in Scripture where we see people praying in a context of persecution. Acts 4 when the believers get together and pray and just see the effect of that. Acts 12 where Peter's in prison and and the believers pray. There's loads of scriptural fuel, if you like, to get us going in our prayers on that Sunday as well.
- Sarah: [14:05](#) To end with, I'll throw this out to all of you? What are some of the main issues that we should be praying for this IDOP?
- Jack: [14:14](#) I think there are a number of countries we would highlight along with other agencies where we see persecution on the increase at this time. You can look through our website, look at some of our resources to see that countries like China, countries like India are certainly seeing an escalation of the persecution in those nations. And so we need to be keeping them at the front of our prayers. But also we talk in terms of persecution - in terms of types of persecution and, and if we look at a country like Nigeria, martyrdom is a major, major issue in Nigeria with many thousands of Christians getting killed in the North of that country, in many thousands of Christians or hundreds of thousands of Christians, if not millions having to flee. And so there are a number of real pressing issues right now.
- Kenneth: [15:01](#) And Release's magazine for the final quarter of the year -the October to December magazine this year is going to have an overall theme related to those whose experience of persecution is to be imprisoned. You know, that's one form of persecution. So again, people who are looking to perhaps our magazine or and so on for resources, there is a particular theme there as well. There's a particular emphasis there on those who are imprisoned for their faith.
- James: [15:30](#) And you can download prisoner profiles again to make that very personal. We've got about a dozen prisoner profiles on the website so you can pray specifically for those individuals. And I think the only thing I would say is that is there someone in your church, or a family in your church or a project that your church has had a particular connection with over a period of time that points you to a particular country or a particular situation.

Cause I think the closer you can bring that back to your own immediate experiences, the more you own that issue, the more that you're really passionate about you're praying so is there already some kind of connection in your church that you can build on?

- Jack: [16:11](#) I think it's just remaining aware as well. And so make sure that again, you equip people to actually be aware of the resources that are available and to watch out for the news stories because we see persecution changing its face at times in countries quite dramatically. So earlier this year we saw the bombing in Sri Lanka and historically the issue for Christians in Sri Lanka has come from a Buddhist nationalist source, but this was from a Muslim, Islamic source. And so immediately the landscape changed in that country in terms of the source of the persecution and the type of persecution so it's just remaining aware really because the landscape of persecution, while it's consistently there, it changes and it flares up in different parts of the world at different times.
- Sarah: [16:59](#) Well, thank you Kenneth, Jack and James for inspiring us to pray for persecuted Christians in general and on the International Day of Prayer in particular.
- All: [17:08](#) Thank you. Thank you very much.
- Sarah: [17:13](#) We all have busy lives. There are lots of things that compete for our attention and it's easy to get consumed by the stuff that is right in front of us. IDOP gives us a focused opportunity to step back for a moment, to remember and to pray for our wider Christian family who share in the sufferings of Christ.
- Sarah: [17:35](#) Thank you so much for listening to Release International's Voice Podcast. Please do subscribe through your favourite podcast app and stay connected to the voice of persecuted Christians. There are many other ways you can get involved. For more information on how you can pray and support persecuted believers across the world, please visit our website, www.releaseinternational.org. Among many other resources there you can find information and ideas to help your church or prayer group take part in IDOP this year. You can also find us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.
- Music: [17:35](#)

Paul Robinson:

[18:11](#)

Remember those who are in prison as if you were in there together with them and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. Do not abandon them!