

Breaking Prayer Alert: How Spirit-Filled Christians Must Intercede for Syria Right Now

What's going on with Syria and Turkey, and how should Christians get involved? David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA, spoke last Thursday to the "Charisma News Podcast" about the nature of the conflict and how it's put entire Christian communities in danger of being slaughtered for their faith.

For anyone confused about the situation on the ground, Curry explains the roots of this problem and how it all happened before sharing the most important things you should be praying for and how you can support the people doing dangerous work on the front lines.

TAYLOR BERGLUND: Can you explain what is going on in Syria and Turkey and provide some context?

DAVID CURRY: Well, you have two countries with different forms of Islamic leadership. They're in conflict. You have Turkey, which has a democratically elected president; you have Syria, which has a dictatorship for some time. So there aren't a lot of good characters on that point. President Aragon of Turkey has alliance with what we would call the Muslim Brotherhood, the same group that ran Egypt into the ground; he's trying to Islamize Turkey in the same way that the Muslim Brotherhood did.

His political party basically is the Muslim Brotherhood, if that gives you an idea, so they have allegiance, common cause with al Qaeda, ISIS, these sorts of things. They're variants of the same ideology. And when ISIS then came into Syria, which is just south, it's on the southern border of Turkey. It went down to Euphrates River, which cuts sort of like a sash

on your body. If you were on a show or you know, a beauty contest, you know, they wear the sash across. Well, the Euphrates River cuts across Syria, just like a sash from the northwest corner down to the southeast. And ISIS came and took over Syria across that middle sash and expanded out. And when that happened, Christians were forced north toward the Turkey border.

So now you have Turkey, going to that one place that all those Christians had moved. They moved there because they were supported, protected by Kurdish people. So, so far as Christians go, this is a very dangerous situation, adding pressure to a group that's already been under a lot of very difficult circumstances.

BERGLUND: To my understanding, the Christians and the Kurdish people there are not safe. Is that because the Turkish government is rolling in now that the United States is not based there anymore? How does that exactly work?

CURRY: Well, Turkey has, President Erdogan has, laid out for a long time that he wants to control that territory. His public message to the international community is somewhat different than what he's saying in Arabic to his Arabic partners. And so this is how we know what's going on. We're not defining this. This is stuff he said in Arabic that we're aware of. And so he was certainly going to invade that area. There weren't enough troops there to stop him if he wanted to, but he doesn't want to inflame any issues with the United States. Although he's obviously done that, what he's saying publicly is, "I need a buffer zone between Syria, these horrible people down here. And I just want 28, 30 miles inland into this country of a buffer zone where these horrible Kurdish people live."

But the reality is, first of all, that buffer zone is where all the people live, because south of that 30-mile "buffer zone" that he calls it, is desert. So all the populated areas are there that he wants to conquer. Secondly, he has a

religious overtone or undertone, depending on how you look at it to what he's doing. He's created ground troops while Turkey is sending missiles into this area. These ground troops are called [inaudible] which is the local name for al-Qaida. So he said to al-Qaida, "You come in and clear out these cities for us." Those folks have started to implement and bring in ISIS soldiers that we're being held by the Kurdish forces, and now they're united. So you have this really, really toxic mix against the Kurdish people and Christians.

Now, just [to] give people context: The Kurds are largely Muslim. Some of them are atheistic, but culturally, they're Muslim, and moderates. So the message within Turkey is, "These are apostate Muslims and Christians. They're no good. Let's go for it."

BERGLUND: In the midst of this crisis, how has Open Doors been helping?

CURRY: A lot of the international community is pulling out their support because it's very dangerous, but we're still there. We want to support these Christian communities that are in desperate need of help. So what we're doing is water, food, emergency care, medical care for these Christians and for Christians to help some of the Kurds that are affected as well; we want churches and communities there to be centers of hope, places where people can go for trauma care and assistance in this crisis.

BERGLUND: So then this is in terms of practical services that you're able to offer through people on the ground there.

CURRY: Yeah, absolutely, very tangible ways that folks can help churches and groups and Christians here, if they want to help Christians in Syria, who under attack for their faith, and it is about their faith; there are the larger civil issues there. But make no mistake: There is an agenda here, a religious agenda; otherwise they would not use al-Qaida, they

would not use ISIS the way they're using them. And this is going to have significant repercussions in the years to come.

BERGLUND: How can Christians be praying about this situation?

CURRY: Well, as you can hear from the description, there's lots of complicated factors, political factors, the political factors within Turkey, or Erdogan, again, is losing some of his political power. So he's seen this as a way to rally people nationalistically within his own country. And then you have political issues here in the States as to what's happening. So we need to pray for clarity for God's people, for protection for God's people, for wisdom for the political, international political leadership for the president, for these folks who are so critical to what's happening in the practical sense right now.

But I think we also need to pray for God's spiritual aims to be met. Sometimes, to use a metaphor, the enemy can think that they're going to trap you, but they're walking into a trap of God's making. We don't know if that's going to happen. But we need to pray that God's will would be done and that some good is in here. It's hard to see right now. But we know that over time, we begin to see how God has used these things. So we need to pray for that. And I do. I do think we need to pray for this Christian split in this region. This is a region where this isn't too far from Antioch, a city in the Bible where some of the first Christian settlements were. So this has historic meaning for us, and it's not as though this has always been run by Islamic extremists. This is an area where Christians have lived and flourished for a long time, not far from Damascus, not far from home. Some of these places in Syria which are you know, just where Christianity was birthed and developed. So a lot of things to pray for here.

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BERGLUND: You mentioned there briefly under one of those prayer points the spiritual dimension of all of this. Can you speak a little more on that?

CURRY: Well, I think when we look at these kinds of situations it's very easy to see a hopeless situation. But when you step back in the larger picture and ask yourself, "Who is the greatest evangelist to the Muslim world in the last 20 years?" ... the answer would probably be Osama bin Laden. Because when he did what he did, more Muslims looked at Islam and said, "Is this what we're all about?" And it started a revival which continues to this day within the Muslim world. That's what I mean when I say there's a spiritual dimension, that even when it seems like they're winning, they could be losing, because Osama bin Laden has brought more people to Jesus in the Muslim world than almost anybody else. In a very perverse way, God has used it. I think it's a beautiful way of how God uses the so-called wisdom of man.

So I'm hoping that that is going to be an epicenter for what God is doing next. And we need to pray to that end. Because the Muslim world is just like every other place around the world: When they hear the name of Jesus, the teaching of Jesus, they want to know more. Christians are opposed. Christians are under pressure. But everywhere you talk about Jesus, people are curious. And they want to know, and it is still as powerful as it's ever been, this message, the transformation and the salvation that comes through the work He did on the cross. So we needn't be hopeless about that. But what happens and has happened since the beginning are dictators and governments and people who have their own agenda, and want to be worshipped, in a sense, above God and be honored above God. We'll always resist that.

BERGLUND: You mentioned before that it's dangerous there, lots of groups are starting to pull out of the region because of the danger, but that Open Doors is still there, is still helping. If people want to help support Open Doors and the

important work that they're doing there at a time when many people aren't doing that work, are there any practical ways that people can support the ministry?

CURRY: There's crisis relief right now; they can go to our website, . And you just look at our Syria project, food, water, medical care, housing, temporary housing, trauma care for people that are going through it right now. We've been in Syria for a long time. We're going to be there for a long time. We do need Jesus people to stand with their brothers and sisters in this part of the world. And they are brothers and sisters. They're our family, and they're willing to die for the name of Jesus. I hope they don't have to, but they're there and serving Him. Let's support them in what simple way we can. So these projects are all there. I encourage churches to mobilize toward this, individuals. This is going to be a big push. It's been about a week and a half since this incursion into these areas; it's going to have repercussions for months to come. We need to take action now.

BERGLUND: It seems like a lot of this really got started with the announcement a few weeks ago with the United States withdrawing its troops there. In terms of people talking to their representatives or to local government, is there anything that we can do to try and politically help the situation as well?

CURRY: Well, I think there [are] a lot of mixed messages about this. And talking to the White House on this subject, giving them what information we have certainly, we're thankful that the Trump administration has been so forceful on religious liberty, so helpful in protecting Christian minorities around the world. This is a misstep in my estimation, based on the impact of what's happening; doesn't mean it can't be corrected. Doesn't mean that some good can't come out of it. But we need more than just the American president to step up. We need the international community to step up and see this for what it is. And I'm hopeful that'll happen. Now the

administration has been taking our briefings and information, they're using it, they're processing it and trying to understand what's happening. This is a moment by moment thing, but let's pray for the president. He needs all the wisdom he can get, the vice president, secretary of state. These are folks who know Open Doors now. They're getting our information. They're listening, giving us good feedback. So let's see what happens.

BERGLUND: Is there anything else that our listeners should know about the situation that's going on in Syria right now?

CURRY: Well, one thing I would say ... is if people want prayer updates, we have an app, Pray for the Persecuted, on all the different platforms, Google Play and Apple. And you can download that; you just get prayer updates on this. I think we'd love to have people getting these prayer updates. So in the moment, pray for pastors in Syria, various folks around the world who have issues going on.

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