

Israelis: A Friend in Need Is a Friend Indeed

On March 11, Israel observed “Good Deed Day,” on which more than 550,000 people participated in more than 8,000 projects in hundreds of communities, performing various acts of kindness, from feeding the hungry to painting worn buildings.

Known for their volunteerism, Israelis draw from the biblical mandate to love your neighbor as yourself. And their desire to help others is exhibited in a huge variety of ways.

While 550,000 is a lot of people, it’s even more significant in that Israel has just over 8 million citizens. That’s slightly under 7 percent of all Israelis taking a break to do something good for others all at once, not including all the other ways we Israelis volunteer and serve one another and our country on a day-to-day basis. It’s certainly something about which to feel proud.

Not included in the 550,000, 30 Christians from the U.S. and some other countries, under the auspices of the Friends of Israel “Hesed” program, also took time out of their day to do something extraordinary. They visited Israel’s national blood bank to lend support and donate money—and even more interestingly, eight donated blood.

Friends of Israel (FOI) is a 75-year-old ministry that exists, simply, to support and bless Israel. Among the partners it supports is Heart to Heart, a virtual blood donation program that allows people who live outside of Israel or are not eligible to donate blood the opportunity to help save lives in Israel by sponsoring a unit of blood.

Jim Showers, president of FOI, says, “Our visit to the blood center will be a lifelong memory for our Hesed group. Being able to give blood in the same land where Jesus shed His blood

for us is a special experience. This sacrifice of blood doesn't compare to the blood Jesus gave but is a deep connection to the Jewish man who died for us 2,000 years ago. This is the core of Christian theology and the event that all Christians put their faith in. What a blessing for the men and women of the Hesed team on the day Israelis set aside to do good deeds, for them to give back to His people the gift of life—their blood, the gift of love.”

For all the FOI guests, the visit was indeed meaningful. The warmth, love and support for Israel that was expressed was extraordinary. Not all Israelis understand the heart for Israel that runs deep with many Christians. So for me, it is a blessing to bear witness to and share that.

Some of the deepest emotions expressed were by those who donated blood themselves. For instance:

- One expressed that he would only give his blood for two flags, “the Stars and Stripes and the Star of David.”
- One expressed the love of Jesus, giving *His* blood, as a model and motivation for Christians to give their blood in Israel.
- Another understood that the risks and needs are just greater in Israel, and it was a privilege to donate here.
- One woman, donating for the first time in her life, shared that she'd always been scared to donate blood but that as soon as she heard they'd be donating blood, she said she would and never hesitated.
- The only woman who was turned away for medical reasons broke down in tears in not being able to give blood in Israel.

The FOI Hesed group's volunteering was not limited to blood services. Many came in medical scrubs after volunteering at a hospital. And in that moment, we witnessed something unique: how donated blood was helping patients in hospital—proof of

the lifesaving qualities of donated blood.

It's a blessing to be able to work with ministries and individuals who express their hearts for Israel by leaving behind the most personal donation they can make: the gift of life. It's gratifying for so many others to join us and donate blood virtually through Heart to Heart. Israelis benefit enormously and are grateful for this support, and we look forward to many others joining us, donating in person and virtually.

Please be in touch to see how you can join this growing trend that so profoundly blesses Israel.

Jonathan Feldstein is the director of Heart to Heart, a unique virtual blood donation program to bless Israel and save lives in Israel. Born and educated in the U.S., Feldstein emigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He writes a regular column for Charisma's Standing With Israel. You can contact Jonathan at firstpersonisrael@.