

Dear anthony

“We are very weak. We don’t have much. We don’t have a safe environment to live in or to raise our children. We don’t have really nice hospitals, schools, services or cars. But if we have true faith we can be happy, because we are weak and we need God. He will give us more than anyone else can. We don’t trust anyone, but we trust God. That is enough.

“He will protect us, and he will keep us from all kinds of evil. I want to rely on Him, and ask Him to help. When I tell him that I am tired, he will refresh me and strengthen me to do my job. All of us have our battles, whether your battle is big or small, you need to keep God with you in your battle.

“We need to pray now. We need to pray to make sure that we keep the sound of God as the most powerful sound in our hearts and minds, not giving the opportunity for any other sounds from the devil to affect us.

“Whatever bad things are happening to us, they will not change our way of seeing God as good. This is my prayer. It is my prayer for all the soldiers of Jesus here in Syria and in the rest of the world. We are one in God, because God is in all of us. We are strong because God is strong. We are rich because God is rich. We are faithful because God is faithful. We will love everyone, even our enemies, because God loves everyone.”

These are the words of “Dr A” our Director of Medical and Humanitarian projects in Syria this morning. We have been talking about Romans 12:17-18

“Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honourable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.”

Over the last few days, many of you have been praying with us, and since Sunday a group of us have been fasting also along with our praying. The situation surrounding Syria is so tense right now, I want to ask every one of you who has faith to join us in praying for this nation this week. While governments seem only to be increasing hostilities and the probability of war and more violence, please can I ask everyone with a faithful heart to pray with us for peace.

There are a few people fasting today, tomorrow, Friday, and Saturday but we would also love some people to commit to cover Thursday and Sunday too.

Please pray for the protection of innocent lives. Syria needs true peace, not bombs, not more fighting and not more interference from outside.

Too many innocent lives have been lost. Too much blood has been spilt. Too many lives have been destroyed. The damage to human souls and hearts is more extensive than the destruction and damage to the buildings in entire districts that were destroyed which I walked through in Syria.

The lives torn apart, the broken bodies, the loss of mothers, fathers and children, the loss of education of children, the loss of medical services, the loss of homes and the

loss of livelihoods are an unacceptable price to pay for power, oil, money, power or control in any country. It has gone too far. This is a dirty war with terrible consequences. Humanity has been lost in this war.

As we enjoy our lives of peace and prosperity here in the West where our daily concerns are a galaxy apart from the daily concerns of so many in Syria, I would urge you to please join me in fasting and praying this week for true peace and protection for these people who are exhausted by these years of brutality, conflict and fighting. It is a small sacrifice for us yet we know that we always see significant results when we humble ourselves to fast with our praying, focusing on something above and beyond ourselves and our own lives and interests.

Please join me in praying for:

- Peace. Real and lasting peace for this nation that has been devastated by unfathomable violence, brutality and suffering. That the people responsible for destroying peace in Syria will be silenced.
- Hope. This horrifying war has robbed millions of hope in their lives, their future and the lives of their children. Without hope for the future it is hard for people to continue engaging with life. Hope is the most important building block in maintaining the ability to keep going and for their communities to encourage each other.
- Rebuilding. It will take decades to rebuild just the physical buildings that have been destroyed in Syria. Many billions of pounds have been spent on creating a level of destruction that cannot be imagined. Walking through the streets of entire districts where not a building lies untouched by the hand of destruction was breathtaking in its awfulness. But this is only a reflection of the damage that has been inflicted on human life in these places which is not as easy for our eyes to see. No amount of time will heal the brokenness inside the hearts of so many Syrians in Syria who have lost everything. Please pray for the rebuilding of a country that can be true home for these people, and for the rebuilding of human hearts and souls.
- Trust. In these last years the trust of the Syrian people has been destroyed. They have been betrayed by neighbours, nations and sometimes those nearest to them. Many struggle to trust after seeing the deterioration of humanity around them. Please pray that trust will also be restored in human hearts in Syria.
- Love. That love will be shown to the people who have suffered, through the practical demonstration of love where actions speak louder than words. That we will continue to be able to reach the most needy with the aid we send and provide, and that both our teams distributing the aid and the aid itself will continue to be protected whilst distributing in very challenging areas. That these people will know that they are loved unconditionally by their precious father who created them in His image.
- Mercy. That the people and entities responsible for this war will understand the true consequences of their actions in their hearts, and will show mercy to the people who are suffering most through their actions.

- Justice. That justice will be done and that the truth will be made clear for all to see the reality of what is happening, what has happened, and that these events will not continue to be replayed in the future with more suffering as a result. That the poorest, the most vulnerable and those who have suffered most in this savage conflict will have justice.

We should be willing, if we do nothing else, to go a step further in intercessory prayer for these people who have suffered so much and need hope so desperately, when we have so much to be grateful for, and there are so many things that we do not need to worry about in our lives. I will fast today, but please could I ask others of you to fast on other days this week so that we can have people fasting and praying for all of this week?

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Love

Samara

EXCERPT FROM PREVIOUS EMAIL CONCERNING SAFEGUARDING AGAINST EXPLOITATION OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Recently there have been extremely troubling issues raised about how aid has been used to exploit women in need, and specific issues and organisations working in Syria have been identified.

We have been addressing these issues in the way we work on the ground since we first started working in Syria and have a safeguarding policy in place. We are now at a stage where all our aid is going to Syria, as we feel needs there are enormous and that so little aid genuinely gets through to the people in need there. As we have such a strong team on the ground there we have made this our area of focus.

We are aware of many of the other groups distributing aid on the ground and the groups they work with. Many have a reputation on the ground for a number of issues in the way they work. We have one specific team on the ground who all have a criminal record check before being employed and are referenced more fully through their communities than anyone would be in taking a job here in the UK, and we are in daily contact with them. We spend many hours planning each of our projects and ensuring that we carry them out to the highest standards. We work with small teams from different communities which enables us to regulate them better as there is little chance of anyone ignoring anything they feel is inappropriate.

All distribution and assessment teams are represented with a 50% female presence, so a male will never be distributing aid to a lone woman or girl without proportionate female attendance. This is a cultural issue and our team on the ground would find it difficult to work in the places we do if they didn't work this sensitive and respectful way. It is culturally unacceptable for men and women to be alone together, and even when I visit Syria I am not left alone in the house or building with a male team

member. If any team members were not working in this manner we would quickly receive complaints.

We also separate the work into different stages: the team collecting data about people in need have no authority to decide who will receive the aid in the end, they simply make lists and we don't distribute to all these listed. The team who assess and distribute are not connected to the people they are assessing and distributing aid to and must follow our criteria for assessment and procedures of working. The team who make up the bags and select and pack aid in the warehouse are also separate from and do not know the people who receive each bag. Additionally, three employees need to be present at any one time in the warehouse so there is no opportunity for any of them to abuse their access to handling our aid. Each of these teams work independently of each other and help to regulate each other.

The other important point is that almost all our distributions are supervised by an official who is completely unconnected to any of our teams. After the distributions have taken place, we have full lists of everyone who received aid and an independent person makes contact with a random selection of people who received our aid to ask for feedback. This is one of the ways we monitor and assess our team members individual performance and work on the ground and in the community.

It is essential to us that we regulate every aspect of our work closely in such a challenging environment. Sadly, humanitarian aid has gained a poor reputation on the ground in Syria for many different reasons of which this is one. We set ourselves apart, and many NGO's on the ground find our way of working laborious and time consuming so prefer not to work with our teams. They would rather find a quick way to get the job done as easily as possible. We encountered this issue in Deir Ez-Zor in December. Some other organisations travelled with our convoy to assist our teams but expected to distribute everything in a few days. In fact, it took our teams and the local teams that were recruited to replace the original organisations around a month to complete all the distributions as we refused to compromise on the important details. It means our distributions cost more and take longer, but we can then have confidence about the way they are conducted and who receives our aid.