

**Monday 7th June**

### **Serving God in an unremarkable corner of the world**

Our story begins back in 1991 when we were both at school. That year, at a conference in London, a Baptist pastor from a little town in the South East of England met a Baptist pastor from an industrial city in the almost-former-Soviet Union, who had been permitted, for the first time ever, to travel abroad. This 'chance' encounter went on to significantly influence our lives.

The British pastor was able to offer hospitality to his new friend following the event, which led to an invitation for him to visit the other's city in an obscure corner of Central Asia. That first visit led to a bold new initiative in which his small church established a new organisation specifically to help this Russian city – its churches, its education systems, and its people. It grew throughout the 1990s as the vision was shared, and its presence on the ground became a significant enterprise, employing many local people.

We both 'happened' to encounter Russian at school – Mike rather randomly doing it to GCSE level and Vicky having a fascination with it through a teacher who had travelled in Russia during Soviet times – as well as each having a leaning towards cross-cultural engagement among the unreached. In due course both of us, through church connections, got to hear of this work in Central Asia. Vicky first visited the city in 1998 during her Russian and Linguistics degree, Mike in 2002 with a summer team from his church. It was only after this that we began a relationship, actually getting engaged in that city whilst there together for a short period.

When we got married in 2004, we felt clear that this was a long-term calling to pursue and set 2007 as a nominal date to move there. It wasn't until 2012 that we were finally able to go. In the waiting, we learnt valuable personal and professional skills, and new missional concepts.

By the time we moved, we had three young kids in tow (4, 2 and a half, and 8 months), and the reality of living there as a family rather than as singles like before was probably the toughest challenge to overcome. On a short vision trip 18 months before we moved, we were shown around a pre-school where young children often spend each weekday while their parents work, and in one room there was row upon row of beds all lined up for the after-lunch nap time. We both felt slapped in the face by the realities of former-Soviet culture's insistence on conformity and its implications for our precious little ones.

Then, less than 3 months before we travelled, we received detailed information about the extent of the lead pollution in the city, caused by a former lead smelter that had operated without any concern for public health throughout Soviet times. The numbers were horrific, and we became very aware of the particularly damaging impact that lead poisoning has on children under 7. We were rattled but, somehow, unbowed, and by faith somehow kept moving forward in what we believed we were called to.

As we have obediently followed God's call, He has repeatedly demonstrated his faithfulness in many ways. Not only have our three kids (now 13, 11 and 9) grown up intelligent and healthy, we also lived through a serious house fire in 2016.

There are many other stories to tell, but our recurring reality is God's faithfulness as we work out our calling in this unremarkable corner of the world. We've had the privilege of overseeing that original work from the 1990s in its current form as it has transitioned from foreign to local leadership, and we're now mentoring those local leaders as they take things far beyond where we ever could. Seeing our local Muslim friends accept Jesus has been an enormous privilege. Stepping out of a boat is a particularly nerve-wrecking thing to do, but if you can keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, there's no better place to be than where he's calling you to.

- Let's thank God for the courage and obedience of this faithful family, who have trusted God and seen His faithfulness. Pray for their continued protection and for God's favour and blessing.

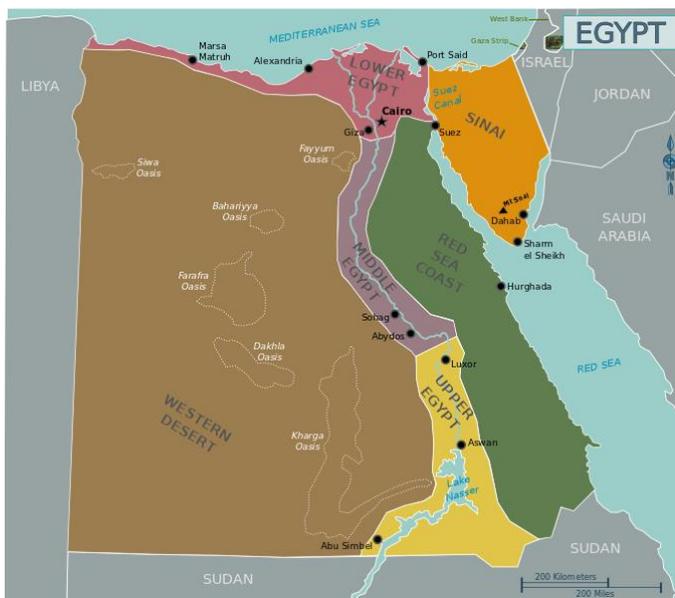
- Mike and Vicky have sown into the lives of Muslims in their community who have known **much** oppression and fear. They are seeing fruit in the lives of local leaders they work with. Pray for an even greater harvest for God's kingdom in this place, as they share the love and hope of Abba Father.
- Is God calling you to step out of the boat and do something remarkable for Him in an unremarkable place? Perhaps spend a few moments praying about this today.

**Tuesday 8th June**

**Egypt                      Pop: 100 million                      Muslim: 90%**

*"The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance." Isaiah 19:25*

Egypt is home to over 70 million Muslims. Islam is the state religion, and Muslims worldwide come to study at the nation's prestigious Al-Azhar University. Leading Egypt since 2014, President el-Sisi has great influence over the most populous country in the Arab world.



The Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt is also the largest Christian community in the Middle East. In fact, Egypt's Christian history is older than its Islamic roots. It is referenced hundreds of times in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. In the book of Isaiah God refers to Egypt as his people, calling them blessed (see above, Isaiah 19:25). According to Open Doors, there are over 16 million Christians in Egypt.

The tension between the dominant Muslim majority and the minority Christians has led to ongoing persecution of followers of Christ. Egypt remains at 16 on the Open Doors World Watch List. It was reported in the news in mid-April that a Coptic Christian and two tribesmen in Egypt's Sinai region had been executed by an Islamic State-affiliated group. You can read the full report

here: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/19/isil-linked-group-in-egypt-claims-execution-of-copt-2-others>

Against this backdrop, more Muslims are coming to Christ. Scripture is more accessible than ever. The Christian message is gaining greater exposure through social media. An increasing number of Egyptian believers are becoming bold in sharing their faith and some are hearing the call to do this in other nations. This shift has been gaining momentum over the past two decades, running in parallel with the rise of the Egyptian prayer movement.

In March this year, Mission Network News reported, "Today, there's a spiritual resurgence underway in Egypt and beyond. When we look at the progress of Bible translations, the gospel being preached to unreached people groups, we just have to conclude that Jesus is standing at the door ready to come back."

- Many Egyptian Muslims know very little about the teachings of Christianity. Pray there will be more openings for them to hear the gospel message.
- Social media is bearing much fruit for the kingdom. But so much more needs to be done if people are to hear the good news. Pray for more openings and workers with the right skills to develop fruitful resources in this area.
- Pray for local believers to stand firm in the face of persecution and to allow the Holy Spirit in them to show others what Jesus can do to transform lives and bless them.

Sources: <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/arab-spring-fallout-spurs-spiritual-change-in-egypt/>  
<https://www.prayercast.com/egypt.html> and  
<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/egypt/>

## Wednesday 9th June

### Siwan Berbers

*“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.” Ps 143:10*

We read yesterday that Egyptian Muslims are turning to Christ. Yet the fact remains that in this Muslim majority country where those who choose to follow Christ face intense persecution, 60% of the population remains unreached according to the Joshua Project. The Siwan Berbers are an unreached people group and we will read of others in the following days.

Siwan Berbers tend to live in the west of Egypt. Until recently they were an isolated desert community living self-sufficiently in a desert oasis and farming dates and olives, but their roots are in North African Berber cultures and sub-Saharan Africa. They lack good health care and schools. In many ways, it seems that time has stood still for these people and life is very simple.

They have no Christian roots, no access to the gospel and there are no known followers of Jesus. The place where they live is very remote, and although a beautiful spot in the desert, the spiritual atmosphere is dark.

The Siwans are hard to get to know but are very hospitable. Generally, Siwan women lead an extremely secluded life. Once married, they are not allowed to leave the house without a male chaperone and must not be seen by any man apart from their husbands. When they go out, they must cover up completely. Arranged marriages are still the norm.

Listen to “All I Have is Christ”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwGSNv3vK3I> and:

- Pray that Siwan Berbers will declare that all they have is Christ.
- Although the Siwans are hospitable, they are very resistant to the gospel message. Ask God to soften hearts and prepare a way for gospel workers to reach them.
- Pray for all those who are trying to connect with the Siwans, that they will find people of peace who are open to the good news and willing to share it with others.

- Prayer has made a huge impact in the spiritual realm in Egypt. Pray for a change in the spiritual atmosphere that allows Siwans to see the truth and declare: 'Jesus is my life'.

## Thursday 10th June

### Eastern Bedouin of the Sinai Peninsula

**Pop: Approximately 1.1million**

The Bedouins live in the East, primarily in the Sinai Peninsula. There are thirteen Bedouin tribes, each one having its own dialect. They are traditionally nomadic tribal people whose way of life has not changed in hundreds of years.

The Bedouin of North Sinai lead a fairly harsh existence, with few amenities. They tend to be insular and somewhat separated from the communities around them. In an effort to rid Egypt of IS, the Egyptian military engaged in executions as well as the destruction of whole villages, which caused many of the residents of the Sinai to feel trapped between the militant members of IS (known as Wilayat Sinai- the Sinai Province) and a heartless military.



Their way of life is now threatened not just by the Egyptian military, but also by political instability, industrial and touristic development and government pressure to stop their nomadic lifestyle.

Yet they are a hospitable people. Houses are not important in the western sense, but they prioritise providing an excellent welcome for their guests. They are happy if they have a seating area complete with carpets and cushions, a good fire that is always lit, as well as coffee and tea. Animals are an integral part of Bedouin life. Camels are referred to as "Ata Allah," the Gift of God because they provide the Bedouin with so much of what they need - transportation, clothing, meat and milk.

They are primarily Sunni Muslims who remain unreached with the gospel message.

- Ask the Lord of the harvest to raise up labourers to engage the Bedouin of North Sinai and let's thank Him for those who have responded. Is God calling you to live among the Bedouin?
- The Bedouin may not have many material possessions, but they do have mobile phones. Ask that they would encounter Scripture and internet sites that would point them to Jesus.
- Pray for peace in Sinai. In the clash between the military and IS, it is the local inhabitants who have suffered most. Pray for the Egyptian government as well as Bedouin tribal leaders to wisely address the situation.
- Women in Bedouin culture can be especially difficult to reach. With a deeply rooted history of honour and tradition, many are required to stay within the home. Pray for creative access to engage Bedouin women.

Friday 11th June

### Coffee, Goosebumps, and the Seat of Honour

Arabic coffee is ingrained within Middle Eastern and Arab culture and tradition and is the most popular form of coffee brewed in the Middle East. We read yesterday how the Eastern Bedouin welcome guests with coffee. The following story is from a Frontiers worker in the Middle East who shares about her love of drinking coffee with Muslim friends—and how every cup is a chance to share Christ.



“Yalla, nit’qahwa,” my Muslim friend says. It means, “Hi, let’s have coffee together!”

Nit’qahwa is my favourite Arabic word. It expresses one of my favourite things to do in the Middle East. I’ve lost track of how many times I’ve nit’qahwa-ed with a friend or a group of women, eating dates and drinking coffee from small demitasse cups. Recently, I nit’qahwa-ed with a couple of friends at a park. As the sun set, my friend Hana refilled my cup with coffee, and we talked about life.

In our previous coffee chats, Hana and I had talked about how to connect with God. This time she spoke about the importance of the Quran and how she strives to read a bit of it every day.

“What about the Bible? Would you like to read it with me?” I asked her.

“You know, I’ve always wanted to read the Bible, but no one has ever asked me to,” she replied with a smile.

I shared how I love reading God’s Word with people in the Middle East because their culture is very similar to the culture Jesus lived in. I told Hana about being invited as a guest in a local home and sitting down at the lowest place, only to be invited to sit in a place of honour.

Finding Luke 14 on my phone, I asked Hana to read Jesus’ words about sitting in a place of honour at a wedding feast. As Hana read through the passage, she began to smile and nod. “Yes,” she said. “This is very important for my people.”

I told her that I didn’t understand the meaning of this passage until I lived in her culture and experienced it for myself.

“What I love the most about this passage is that it gives us such a beautiful picture of what Jesus does for us,” I continued. “We humble ourselves as He humbled Himself for us. When we give our lives to Him, He invites us to sit with Him at the seat of honour.”

Her eyes opened wide. “Wow! That is so amazing, it gives me goosebumps.”

With every nit’qahwa, I pray for deep, meaningful conversations and strive to be ready to share God’s Word. Each cup of coffee is a chance to draw women to Christ by listening to their stories, asking them questions of faith, and inviting them to discover Jesus in the Word.

- Pray for Hana’s heart to be drawn to Jesus as she reads the Word of God.

- Ask the Lord to give Frontiers workers meaningful and fruitful conversations as they spend time with Egyptian Muslims.
- Pray that God will give workers the gift of language and increase their vocabulary to share deeply with the people they're called to reach, including the Eastern Bedouin, Siwa, Nubians and Beja.

Main photo by YUCAR FotoGrafik

Source: <https://frontiersusa.org/blog/coffee-and-goosebumps/>

## Saturday 12th June

### Beja and Nubians

*"If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish."* Matt 18:12-14

For more than 4000 years, the **Beja** peoples have lived in one of the world's most difficult environments – the desert regions of Egypt, Sudan and Eritrea. They are believed to be descended from the Biblical Cushites who lived by the shores of the Nile. Today, over 1 million Bedawi Bejas live in southeastern Egypt.

Traditionally nomadic shepherds, they live a simple, outdoor lifestyle and are known for their gentle and peaceful nature. They love dancing and music. Each year, they migrate with herds of camels, goats, sheep, and cattle. Some farm, producing sorghum or commercial crops such as cotton and grains. Strong tribal ties of family and clan have provided Beja with unity in hard times. However, this unity is breaking down as families move to urban areas for education, work and healthcare.

The **Nubian** people of southern Egypt once followed Christ, but with the Arab invasions in the seventh and eleventh centuries, they became arabised and followed Islam. By 1963 this group was displaced by the construction of the Aswan Dam, which flooded their home and lands. They now live east of the dam in a low-lying fertile plain that is irrigated by the Nile River.

Although they have Christian roots, today the Beja and Nubian peoples are 100% Muslim and few are known to follow Christ.

- Pray that the Lord would raise up intercessors and workers to bring them the message of salvation.
- Pray that this would be a time of spiritual breakthroughs leading to a church planting movement.
- Pray for vibrant believing fellowships to spread among the Bejas and Nubians, bringing great blessing upon their communities.
- Let's finish this week of prayer by thanking God for all those workers who have counted the cost to go and live among the unreached of Egypt to bring them the good news and let's ask Him to bless and anoint them again for His work.

Sources of most content: <http://www.globalprayerdigest.org/issue/day/bedawi-bejas-in-egypt1/> and <http://www.globalprayerdigest.org/issue/day/arabized-nubians-in-egypt/>