



February 7 2023

## Turkey and Syria

*supporting partners in earthquake response*



Early Monday morning, February 6, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 struck in southeastern Turkey and northern Syria. At least 78 aftershocks have been reported, and a second earthquake nearly as large (7.5) rocked central Turkey not long after. Early analysis shows that the quake was not only quite strong, but also very shallow, which is often more damaging than deeper ones.

Week of Compassion is in close contact with our partners in the region, including colleagues who were coincidentally traveling in the affected area. Our partners are currently conducting rapid assessments to respond to this disaster in both Syria and Turkey, and Week of Compassion will be ready to support efforts for immediate response and what will surely be extensive long-term recovery. We continue to hear from the region; our colleagues at Global Ministries shared this comment from one of their partners in the midst of assessment:

*I have heard from some partners in the region. Our own historic presence in Gaziantep, Turkey, included the establishment of a hospital there, where we had a significant missionary presence. The hospital is now owned and operated by our Turkish partner, the Heath and Education Foundation (SEV). They wrote that the hospital sustained minimal damage but that "Unfortunately, ten cities are affected by the massive earthquake. Gaziantep is one which is badly affected."*

As of Tuesday morning U.S. time, more than 5000 people are confirmed dead, 25,000 injured, while hundreds of families remain trapped. Nearly 10,000 search and rescue workers have been deployed and nearly 3000 buildings have collapsed.

How on earth do we fathom such destruction, let alone know where to start doing anything about it? In the face of such immense suffering, how can we begin to envision communities restored? How can we possibly alleviate the suffering or transform suffering into hope?

Amidst the questions of "how?," we recall that the witness of scripture comes from the depths of rubble and grief. The Lamentations text (Lamentations 3:21-23) that serves as the theme for our 2023 Special Offering, speaks from a moment of national devastation

and seemingly unending hopelessness, when the city had been reduced to ruin. The writer of Lamentations brings the response that we share as well: "Because I remember all this, I have hope. God's compassion has never failed." God's presence had never failed, had always seen them through ... and would again this time.

These earthquakes and aftershocks - which were felt as far away as Jerusalem, Lebanon, and Cyprus, and which can be expected to continue for as much as a few weeks - have brought the attention of nations from every direction. The lament and outcry of a nation distraught amid disaster rises up from the very ground. And we pray with confidence that the mercies of God continue to rise up as well.

A Syrian population already left vulnerable in the aftermath of war and in the face of ongoing political conflict is left doubly vulnerable to such a catastrophic event. Already weakened buildings (where buildings have remained at all), or those not rebuilt to code, have been further affected and even destroyed, leading to yet another mass displacement of families and disruption of livelihoods, all in the midst of harsh winter weather.

**The scope of such tragedy makes partnership critical.** The work of Week of Compassion is the work of partnership – relationships and systems established over years of response and recovery in impacted communities. Week of Compassion can respond immediately, and for the long haul, because of partners through ACT Alliance and the ACT Syria Forum; and because of partners through Global Ministries, including the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches, the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, and the Forum for Development, Culture, and Dialogue. These partners will be looking to provide both immediate and long term support.

Week of Compassion is grateful for these key partners, who bring extensive experience in this type of work, and are well-acquainted with the character of the region and the ongoing conflict in the area. The partners Week of Compassion turns to and works through in these moments are ready to respond and best suited to the task because they have been there for years, working through generations of crisis and need.

**Because of your generosity - through your gifts to Week of Compassion during the Special Offering and throughout the year - you are present with those who suffer, reminding them of God's never-failing compassion, mercy, and presence.** May God comfort those who mourn, and bring solace to all who are left feeling lost. May God's mercies never fail, may they rise up anew, mixed with our own fervent prayers and our abundant compassion.

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Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Though mountains shake and seas roll, Creator God,  
you are with us. **You are with us.** You are with us.  
We call on that steadiness, we call on your mercy,  
we call on your goodness. Lord, we call to you.

For your beloveds in Turkey and in Syria, for those at the center  
of an earthquake and for those in range of the aftershocks.

For those mourning their dead,  
and searching their missing,  
for those in the backbreaking, heartrending work  
of rescue and recovery.

For those they find, and for those they cannot.

We call to you, steady and sure God.

Though the mountains shake, though we are gripped by fear,  
**we call to you.**

Confident that you hear us, from wherever we are,  
with whatever voice we can manage, we call out.

Hear us, Lord. Comfort us. Be near to us. Be near to us.

Be near.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.



*~ on a 7.8 earthquake in Turkey & Syria ~ 2.5.23*

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