

Week 5: Pray for Twen (Eritrea)

Arrest and Background Eritrean Christian Twen (32) has been in prison for ten years. She has endured terrible beatings and torture at the hands of prison guards, and spent time in a shipping container with gospel singer Helen Berhane. Twen was arrested in January 2005 at an underground church prayer meeting celebrating New Year, and was sent to Mai Sirwa Prison.



In 2006, Twen was joined by a large group of Christians arrested at a wedding in Asmara. Twen and the women from this group who refused to sign papers stating they would no longer engage in Christian activities were sent to one of Eritrea's harshest prisons, Wi'a, situated on the Red Sea coast, one of the most inhospitable places on earth. Hundreds of prisoners have died in Wi'a prison as a result of the extreme heat and appalling sanitary conditions. It was eventually closed by government order, and Twen and her group were sent to Me'etr prison in the remote northwest, which mainly houses Christians.

Twen is one of twelve women who have been in prison for up to 10 years. Also known as "Esther", she is mentioned in Helen Berhane's book *Song of the Nightingale*. When Helen was very ill because of beatings and prison conditions, Twen fed her, washed her wounds, carried her to the toilet and occasionally took punishment in place of her.

Family Twen's family home is in the capital, Asmara. When she was a new Christian, in 2004 Twen was arrested but was released after her father persuaded her to sign a paper saying she would not continue to meet with other Christians, share her faith or engage in Christian activities.

Latest news Twen is a key women's leader in prison and cares for the other women prisoners. Others describe her as a "precious, lovely Christian", determined to follow Jesus and willing to stay in prison as long as God enables her to serve Him there. Once, because of illness, Twen was allowed to stay with her family in Asmara for a month, but after treatment she made her own way back to the prison, rather than arrange to be smuggled out of Eritrea.

Christian Prisoners The number of Christians in prison for their faith is much lower than it used to be, at about 300. Some 173 have been in prison for more than six years. The number of new arrests is low: last year there were only 36, with most released after a few months. Hundreds of ex-prisoners who were arrested in their late teens and spent more than six years in prison are now, in their mid twenties, dependent on their parents.

Prayer Points

1. Pray for health and strength for Twen as she cares for her fellow prisoners.
2. Pray that other prisoners will see the love of Jesus displayed in Twen's life.
3. Pray for an end to the persecution of Christians in Eritrea and for the release of those prisoners who have been imprisoned without charge for many years.